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Executive Editor
Ronald Weber

Guest Editors
Edmund Cueva and William Nowak

Co- Editor
Stephen Husarik

Co- Editor
Lee Ann Elliott Westman

Book Review Editor
Edmund Cueva

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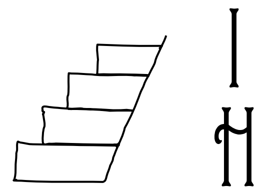
Expanding the Scope of Horror



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Editors' Introduction: Expanding the Scope of Horror

Edmund Cueva, *University of Houston-Downtown*
William Nowak, *University of Houston-Downtown*

In her analysis of postmodern horror film, Isabel Cristina Pinedo reflects the Freudian orientation of most horror scholarship when she calls the genre a "cultural nightmare," in which repressed aspects of society and human identity return through chaotic images of violence, corporeal or social disintegration, and irrationality.[1] Most scholars in the field of horror studies today agree that monsters and the other creatures of horror make the uncanny elements of our identities manifest, and subject us to ironically contradictory impulses of attraction and repulsion, just as Freud theorizes about disturbing dreams. But whether one approaches horror from a psychological, a sociological, or a genre- or gender-centered theoretical stance, considerations of boundaries, and more specifically the boundaries that define human experience and the multiple ways in which they can be broken or transgressed, almost inevitably arise. This is thus because, at some level, horror always involves the uncanny dissolution of the classifications by which we understand the individual and society. Race, gender, class, and all the other categories by which human beings define and differentiate themselves lurk in the interstices of horror. Even if one adopts a Deleuzian aversion to the grand narratives of psychoanalysis and social theory that see horror as a meditation on the abject or the monsters of the id, and focuses instead on the thrill that horror fans experience while consuming dark fantasies, even the bodily effects of horror stand out for their extreme ability to, as Anna Powell notes in reference to the psycho-physiological effects of horror cinema, "push through subjective boundaries."[2] By this she means that the viewers of horror films tend to lose control over the limits between self and the horrific images on the screen. Horror films usually represent monstrous individuals and their victims who likewise lose control over their "ego-boundaries." Viewers of such creatures of the dark lose themselves in those fictions in a complex mishmash of desire, revulsion and fear as their hearts start to pump, their blood pressure rises, and sweat begins to flow in reaction to the terrifying images on the screen.[3]

Such descriptions of horror's ability to move people, not just intellectually but physically, may help explain its long-lasting popularity across centuries (perhaps even millennia, as Nadia Scipparcercola suggests in this collection)

and across various modes of discourse (filmic, literary, etc.). Granted, the dark genre has usually been dismissed by the keepers of the aesthetic canon as a déclassé mode of expression, only suitable for teenagers in search of the cheap thrills described by Powell. Yet horror revels in its marginality. Its boundary-breaking essence attracts those who seek to interrogate the facile truisms of society. It directs our attention to the underbelly of life, to those dark places where rationality and order are overwhelmed by the abject, the filth, the detritus and slippages that logocentric discourse seeks to banish from human society.

Our cover art for this special issue on horror, *Saturn Devouring His Son* by Francisco de Goya, is a good case in point. This Black Painting not only suggests the longevity of horror's appeal from ancient myth to Enlightenment allegory, but it also exemplifies the critical power of the horrific over our collective imagination. The myth of Saturn exposes the abyss of the un-human that lurks just underneath (or is it at the heart?) of human normalcy. The father who devours his own offspring in order to maintain his hegemony reflects (perversely, of course) a commonplace of traditional society: that the good of the community is best served by maintaining the status quo and avoiding revolutionary changes at all costs. And still, by depicting such a truism with this cannibalistic metaphor, the myth converts a foundational truth of the society that created it into something abysmal. Goya deploys that myth for his own purposes: to denounce the anti-Enlightenment traditionalism of the restored absolutism of Fernando VII in early nineteenth-century Spain. But this Black Painting, a revealing example of his "caprichos" or works of art he made not for paying clients but to satisfy his own critical perspective and painterly desires, recalls the discourse of horror that would continue to find widespread popularity throughout the nineteenth century in the Gothic novel. The painting's disintegration of form and humanism, together with its eerie nocturnal color palette and tonality, expresses Goya's revulsion against the absolutism that promised to destroy Spain's Enlightened elite in the hopes of staving off revolutionary social change. As in the best of the horror genre that would follow, Goya's painting binds passion and intellectual critique in a nightmarish image that still manages to startle, and engage, us today.

Since horror, even more so than other genres, is characterized by the tendency to transgress boundaries, to mutate its own expectations, and to incite cross-generic hybridization, we believe that this special issue of *Interdisciplinary Humanities* on expanding the scope of horror is the perfect venue for broadening the dialogue about dark fantasy and other types of fear- and dread-producing objects. We have not limited this issue's scope to cinematic or literary horror, but rather we have welcomed analyses of a wide variety of horror-producing artifacts and mediated experiences, including horror expressed in nineteenth-century political discourse, in activist photographical essays, in theatrical horror and scare events such as haunted houses, in macabre tourist destinations that mean to scare people, and even in the heart of darkness that lurks in mystical apophasis. The following collection

of essays brings together voices from a wide variety of academic disciplines with different theoretical and historical approaches to the horror genre and related phenomena. Our aim was to enable productive discussion about horror and its many permutations across the disciplinary divides that narrow academic discourse and create interpretive blind spots. And our ten contributors have fulfilled our hopes for just such a boundary-breaking exchange.

Our first selection, "Staging Hell: Performance and the Horror Genre" by Madelon Hoedt, exemplifies the spirit of this collection in its expansion of the scope of horror to include performance and theatricality. Hoedt's essay reconsiders one of the traits that many theorists of horror have identified as fundamental to the genre: the distancing that aesthetic representation, the fictional framework of books or films, puts around the experience of engaging horrific material. Many theorists of the genre have stipulated that the fictionality of horrific art serves as buffer against the disquiet that it evokes. But performance horror, as Hoedt points out, reduces that comforting distance between spectator and horrifying content to a minimum. In staged theatrical horror, scare attractions, and zombie survival events, the audience becomes an integral part, and often the protagonist, of the work. When wandering through the haunted house, or fleeing from screaming zombie actors, the old trick of closing one's eyes or shutting the book for a moment's respite does not work. With a series of insightful generic considerations for those interested in the analysis of performance horror and its immersive aspects, this piece offers an intriguing starting point for further discussions of this little-explored corner of horror.

The second essay of the collection, "Placing Horror: An Interdisciplinary Investigation" by Katherine A. Wagner, represents another way in which our contributors have expanded the scope of horror. Wagner achieves this goal not by considering new types of horror but by applying an interdisciplinary approach to a basic trait of the genre: the importance of eerie or uncanny places in horror. Places, she reminds us, are culturally inscribed and productive of meaning in many different contexts. Although recognizing that place would seem to have been well investigated by previous horror scholarship, particularly in studies of Gothic novels, Wagner insists that the horrific place has most often been limited to a secondary role in the interpretation of the "real issues" said to be at play in any given horror text. By repositioning "place" at the center of inquiries into horror, and subjecting it to interdisciplinary analysis, Wagner finds many suggestive points of intersection with other modes of horror scholarship, such as feminism, trauma studies, sociology, and psychoanalysis.

W. Scott Poole's contribution, "Historicizing Lovecraft: The Great War and America's Cosmic Dread," demonstrates a third way in which our contributors have expanded the investigation of horror: through careful historical analysis of horror texts. Poole's article argues that H. P. Lovecraft's elaboration of cosmic dread in his pulp fiction responds to the crisis in modernism caused by World War I. This is the same crisis that inspired many

of the canonical writers of the same period, such as T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. By situating Lovecraft in relation to that pervasive cultural malaise and beside more recognized literary responses to it, Poole seeks to recuperate him as a major figure for mainstream discussions of the cultural and literary history of the twentieth century. Although there exists a considerable body of scholarship on Lovecraft inside horror studies, Poole advocates for the end of a historical treatment that relegates Lovecraftian writing to "genre" studies. Lovecraft's work, like so many other expressions of horror, can be more fully explicated by analysis of his engagement with the prevailing cultural preoccupations of his day.

Donna Mitchell's "Doll as a *Memento Infanti*" exemplifies another way our contributors have expanded the scope of horror—through a gender studies approach—as her articles explores the feminist implications of the doll as simulacrum for the dead female child in horror narratives. Using a conceptual framework informed by Hélène Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Baudrillard, Mitchell analyzes several real-life phenomena such as the case of Anatoly Moskvin, the serial mummifier of girls' corpses, and Mexico's macabre tourist attraction Isla de las Muñecas. But the bulk of her argument rests on an insightful reading of the character of the undead, doll-like Claudia in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, which demonstrates that the connection between doll and young girl reveals the othering of women in patriarchal society.

Nadia Scippacercola's "From Post-Modern to Ancient Greco-Roman Horror: Some Remarks for Further Investigations" expands the traditional historicization of the horror genre by looking back beyond the Gothic Novel for more ancient treatments of the horror theme. Positing the existence of a psycho-physiological experience of "real horror" and contrasting that with the mediated representation of the horror genre in literature and other media, Scipparcercola notes that certain abominable practices (such as cannibalism, bestiality, and the like) as well as some inhuman characteristics produce horrified physiological reactions in people, and have always done so. The representation of this bodily and mental reaction in fiction adds a new level of mediation that purports to offer mastery of our worst fears through a cathartic but vicarious experience of horror. Scipparcercola traces the ancient roots of horror fiction in Greek love novels from the first and second centuries A.D. Horrific actions depicted in those novels have a variety of functions (such as creating suspense or evoking supernatural powers or even creating comic effects) but distancing techniques help to direct readers' and listeners' reactions to these scenes towards more controlled understandings of how human society prevails over horror.

"'Hurrah for Hanging': Monsters, Irony, and the Contested Meaning of Horror in Nineteenth-Century America" by Jeffrey A. Mullins investigates the ways in which the rhetoric of Gothic horror was deployed by writers such as Walt Whitman and others as part of the discussion of culturally and politically-charged issues such as race, slavery, and the death penalty. The image of the

monstrous murderer, human only in form, is just one instance of the rhetoric of horror that early nineteenth century writers used to express moral indignation. Horror appeared as an easy moralistic discursive appeal in essays treating a wide variety of topics, from religious differences to the use of alcohol. By reviewing these examples, Mullins concludes that even as early as the 1800s, horror was a "contested category;" its rhetoric could be deployed to dehumanize anti-social elements (like murderers) or turned around against an unjust society itself, which, as in Whitman's more ironic use of the trope, could itself be seen as the truly monstrous force behind horrific behavior.

In "The Foolkiller Movie: Uncovering an Overlooked Horror Genre," Florent Christol addresses a type of horror that has been perhaps the most stigmatized of all: the slasher film. Christol studies the emergence of the slasher genre from an overlooked type of horror film that he names the "Foolkiller movie." In this early version of what would become the slasher genre, a bullied outsider or scapegoat represented as a "fool" reacts with righteous but horrifying violence against her or his socially privileged tormenters. As the focus of such gory movies shifts from explaining the reasons that this outcast evolved into a violent monster, in films such as *Carrie* or *Willard*, to depicting in ever more lurid detail the violence enacted on the monster's victims, the slasher genre emerges out of the Foolkiller movie and its moral message likewise mutates into a more "mythic" mode. Using Rene Girard's theory of the scapegoat and foundational social violence, Christol posits that the slasher movie dehumanizes the originally humanized foolkiller, turning him into a malevolent killer clown like the Freddy Kruger of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, in order to exonerate society for its original mob violence against an outsider.

Erica Tortolani's "Dual Images of the 'Monstrous Feminine' in *Single White Female* (1992)" uses Barbara Creed's concept of the "monstrous feminine" to explore the representation of threatening femininity in a film that exemplifies a genre that Barry Keith Gartner has called the "yuppie horror film." Tortolani shows how the film's doubling of monstrous female characters, in the abrasive career woman and in her psychotic roommate, reveals woman as an Other that will always threaten the patriarchal order of society.

Emily Gallagher's "Mobilizing the Grotesque: The Anti-War Publications of Ernst Friedrich and Frederick A. Barber" expands the scope of horror-related scholarship by analyzing the anti-war photographic essays of Ernst Friedrich (*War Against War*, 1924) and Frederick A. Barber (*The Horror of It*, 1932). Gallagher argues that both of these pacifist activists use grotesque photographs of war victims (soldiers and civilians) to shape viewers' and readers' psychological response to topics related to war. The extremely grotesque photographs of people maimed or killed by war are deployed by Friedrich and Barber alongside ironically satirical captions to deconstruct the rhetoric of victimization used by warmongers in the interwar period. Readers' horrified reactions to the photographs were calculated to undermine the

nationalistic victimhood narratives that governments used to prepare their people for war.

The final contribution to this collection, "Mystical Horror: Apophasis, Self-Subversion, and the Ligottian Universe" by Brad Baumgartner, employs an interdisciplinary approach that combines criticism on mysticism, literature, and philosophy. In this article, Baumgartner explores the connections between Thomas Ligotti's weird fiction and the mystical tradition of apophasis, a discourse on the ineffable or that which cannot be said. Ligotti's short stories, according to Baumgartner, "posit an un-grounded pessimo-mysticism" that expresses life in a post-Nietzschean universe where God is long dead and the human self is recognized as an illusion. By reading Ligotti in the light of the tradition of mystical apophasis, Baumgartner's piece provides a suggestive place to close our interdisciplinary exploration of horror. Ligotti's writing, he concludes, "describes the inherently inconsistent nature of accessing the Real in our contemporary culture, attesting to a creative element specific to genre horror that performs the very paradoxical task that the medieval mystic's apophatic discourse once sought to display, namely that human consciousness itself can be a limit."

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[1] "Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film" in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004), 107.

[2] *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 23.

[3] Powell asserts that "Horror's frequent undermining of normative perspective by fragmented images and blurred focus operates in tandem with the erosion of the subjective coherence and ego-boundaries of its characters. It also affects the spectator's sense of cognitive control over the subject matter as our optic nerves and auditory membranes struggle to process confusing data. Our projected coherence is undermined as we slide into a molecular assemblage with the body of the film" (5).

Staging Hell: Performance and the Horror Genre

Madelon Hoedt
University of South Wales

This is not a film. This is not a game. This is theatre.
~Flyer for the play *Ghost Stories*

Blanketed by the gloom of the cinema or lit by a bedside lamp, anyone is safe to savor the dark delights the horror genre has to offer. As shown by their enduring popularity, audiences have an appetite for all kinds of terrifying entertainments, feeling secure in the knowledge that they can fear without being threatened. Yet what if this is not true? What if, instead of simply watching a victim being chased by a chainsaw-wielding maniac, *they* are the ones being chased, *they* are the ones who have to run for their lives? What happens when the horrors come to find the audience as they move through the darkness? It is these questions that underpin the current discussion, which will focus on a particular form of the genre: performance horror. Although the study of horror is not a new pursuit, most existing studies tend to focus on books and movies. The objective of this paper is to move beyond this limited tradition, instead discussing a form that encompasses both traditional stage plays as well as more immersive experiences such as scare attractions and zombie events. Led by this focus, the discussion starts with the premise that performance horror injects a number of specific features into the genre and provides its audience with an experience that is live and often includes some degree of immersion. Performance horror places its audience at the center of the experience, often asking (or even demanding) direct input from its spectators in order to create a narrative. The aim is not to compare the form to the film or novel, but rather to draw attention to its specific features, which require a different approach for analysis, and it is this approach the paper seeks to explore.

What will be understood as performance horror here is a form of the genre that is closely related to the performing arts, incorporating a variety of

stage tropes. The term can refer to actual theatre work, but encompasses a larger number of productions. I would like to put forward that the key difference between live action horror and other genre forms is its immediacy, its liveness: rather than being merely portrayed in words or on screen, the frightening narrative and effects of this form are played out in real-time, often in close proximity to the spectator. It is this aspect, this confrontation, which is at the heart of the form and distinguishes it from the books and films that are so often discussed in the critical literature. Performance horror, or live action horror, insists on one's engagement with the material through a meeting between living beings. In this way, the audience is brought out of the darkness and thrust into the light; in many cases, they become the focus of the performance, even the protagonist.

It should be noted that the term "performance horror" encompasses a number of performance experiences, and for the purpose of this paper, I will be drawing on three forms in particular: staged horror theatre, scare attractions, and zombie survival events. The first is closest to a traditional theatre experience, making use of the fourth wall and positioning spectators in seats in the auditorium, away from the stage. By contrast, both the scare attractions and zombie events aim for an experience that is much more immersive, asking the audience to be active as they move from location to location and scene to scene. Scare attractions are venues that employ a walkthrough dramatic presentation that includes live actors, animatronics, and various effects to scare its visitors, which allow (and force) the audience to take a more active role. Similarly, the zombie events offer immersive games where the participants become an active part of a horror narrative.

Productions that take place within a traditional theatre space often play with the boundaries between performer and audience. Whilst spectators might still be seated in the dark, and assume they are safe, the creators of the productions discussed here utilize a variety of means to establish the theatre as a place that is not safe by (ab)using familiar conventions and breaking or altering the boundaries of performance. This process becomes apparent in terms of both context and staging, but also in narrative. As opposed to other types of horror experiences, theatre has the opportunity to take its audience by the hand and guide it through the story it has to tell. Scare attractions and zombie events, however, obliterate these boundaries, surrounding their audiences with actors, props, costume, sound, and light, focusing on stage effects as opposed to a more traditional narrative. Participants are able to traverse the space and discover the story, rather than it being offered to them from the central location of the stage. It becomes more difficult to create a carefully layered plot, and instead, emotional responses are foregrounded. Personal stories and shared experience become a big part of the performance as the events place a higher demand on their audience to invest, both physically and emotionally. Through careful manipulation of feelings of control and distance, audiences are brought face-to-face with the stuff of their

nightmares and become part of their own horror story, rather than taking the role of a passive spectator.

Yet in stating that performance horror differs from other forms of the genre, it is vital to examine what these differences are. Key here is the concept of liveness and the connection a performance can create with those who experience it. Indeed, Aleks Sierz is one of many who draws attention to this ability of theatre to create immediacy:

> How can theatre be so shocking? The main reason is that it is live. […] When you're watching a play, which is mostly in real time with real people acting just a few feet away from you, not only do you find yourself reacting but you also know that others are reacting and are aware of your reaction.[1]

It could be argued that the element of liveness that is present in performance horror thus affects its audience in a more direct way than film could: as Sierz states, one is surrounded by real people, with real people acting close to you, and real people getting hurt in the same space, as opposed to actions being played out on a screen. This view is echoed by Peter Brook: "The theatre is the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity."[2] In addition to this sense of physical presence in live performance, the horror events bring something else to the table, as is discussed by Emma McEvoy: "Theatre and dramatic performance have the potential for introducing potent factors into Gothic work—real space and real time."[3] Commenting on this use of space, McEvoy adds another factor to the intensity that can be created by a horror performance event: "Site-specific performance can bring the audience into the haunted house, materializing the spaces of the Gothic."[4] The spectator is not only told the proverbial stuff of nightmares, but is physically transported into, and thus brought closer, to their fears.

These separate elements, real space, real time, real presence, real people, in short, immediacy, can be connected to two concepts, control and distance, which have been put forward by John Morreall in his paper "Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fiction." Morreall defines control as the power an audience can exert over the experience, the means by which they can directly influence or manipulate the medium they are interacting with. Often you hear people talking about how they closed their eyes during a particularly gory part of a movie, or how they had to stop reading a book because it was simply too scary. This is what Morreall means by control: the option to manipulate the medium in such a way that the horrific experience ceases immediately. It could be argued that such an emergency exit is available when interacting with both novels and film: by closing the book, or closing one's eyes and blocking one's ears, the horror is immediately shut out, or to use Morreall's own words: "When we have this ability to start, stop, and direct the experience, we can enjoy a wide range of experiences, even 'unpleasant' ones."[5] His argument is

based on the notion that, as long as audiences are in control, negative, (and for the sake of this argument) scary emotions can be enjoyed: "Intense fear—terror—is not enjoyable because in such a state we lose control over our attention, our bodies, and our total situation."[6]

Next to the sense of control, Morreall adds a second concept, distance, stating that: "Control is usually easiest to maintain when we are merely attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, as when we watch from a distance some event unrelated to us."[7] Distance implies the position of the audience in respect to the material. For instance, in the case of a film, the viewer occupies a third person view and is watching the actions of others without actively taking part. Although identification of the audience with the characters is possible and even necessary to fully enjoy the novel or film, it can still be noted that there is a difference between the audience and the actual story. They can identify, but are not actively involved: the protagonists are chased by a maniacal killer, and not the cinema-goer. Indeed, Morreall is not the only author to draw attention to these ideas: Isabel Pinedo similarly states that in horror entertainment:

> [T]he element of control, the conviction that there is nothing to be afraid of, turns stress/arousal (beating heart, dry mouth, panic grip) into a pleasurable sensation. [...] [R]ecreational terror must produce a bounded experience that will not generate so much distress that the seasoned horror audience member will walk out. In order to produce recreational terror, the re-creation of terror must be only partial. [...] The experience of terror is bounded by the tension between proximity and distance, reality and illusion. In recreational terror, we fear the threat of physical danger, but the danger fails to materialize.[8]

When read in relation to the concept of liveness, it would seem that Morreall's and Pinedo's formulations of the affect created by horror make for a more intense and potentially experience in the case of performance horror. Cinemagoers can hear the roar of the chainsaw and the screams of the victim; they can follow the chase and imagine the fear, and ultimately the feeling of the teeth sinking into flesh. They can identify with the protagonists and shudder at the mere notion of experiencing such pain. In the case of live action horror, visitors become protagonists themselves: instead of merely watching characters being beset by a maniacal killer, they are themselves chased through dark corridors. Because of the elements of real space and time mentioned by McEvoy, as well as the immediacy that is addressed by Sierz and Brook, the feelings of control and distance will be significantly less in the case of such entertainments, thus offering the potential to make the event more distressing.

This new dynamic and the element of liveness, however, have yet to be addressed by existing critical literature. Although, as I have already mentioned, horror studies is not a new discipline, its established approaches are not necessarily suitable to discuss adequately the genre in performance. In many cases, the question "why horror?," with the apparent conundrum of the enjoyment audiences take in the terrifying entertainments, is at the heart of these discussions. Thoughts on how to explain the attraction of such frightening material have taken as many different forms as the genre itself and it will be worthwhile to address briefly the most prevalent critical theories about horror's popularity before reviewing their application to the form discussed here.

In the first part of his book *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills outlines the three most important strands of horror theory: the cognitive, fantastic, and psychoanalytic approaches, and it is his analysis that will form the basis for this overview. The cognitive theory is the first to be addressed by Hills and his presentation of the topic is largely based on the arguments presented by Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror*. Within the book, Hills provides a concise list of the aspects of horror that cognitivists have put forward as the elements that dictate the pleasures of horrific materials:

- fascination and curiosity at impossible, monstrous beings;
- disclosure plots that resemble the "proofs" of philosophy;
- concerns with power/control; and
- evaluations of morality/creativity.[9]

The first idea listed is voiced by Carroll and refers to an attraction of horror based on morbid curiosity. It reminds one of the experience with which one might be familiar, that of something (or someone) being so ugly, so revolting, that one simply cannot look away. Connected to this is the second option as presented by Carroll, which relates to the idea that, in order to witness the ending of a story, one is inclined to ignore the scary or gory aspects of the narrative or at least tolerate them for the sake of the plot. Carroll's views state that curiosity and fascination are the main motives for the consumption and enjoyment of horror: people are able to endure the horrific nature of the material in order to find out what happens and how the story ends. As such, Carroll's cognitive viewpoints rely heavily on the existence of an actual narrative, a full storyline with beginning and end, and moments of disclosure.

The third point in the list drawn up by Hills, the "concerns of power and control," are described in the essay "Power, Horror and Ambivalence" by Daniel Shaw: "

> Much of the pleasure that we take in [horror films] is derived from two sources: 1) Identifying with the horrifying force, and vicariously enjoying the havoc that it wreaks; and 2)

Sharing in the triumph that the human protagonists usually achieve over that force."[10]

To Shaw, the idea of possessing such destructive power draws people in: "This is why I propose that we see the horrific force as an embodiment of awesome power, attractive and pleasurable in itself."[11] This is closely related to the last point, which focuses on the idea of aesthetic distance and a rational approach, assuming that an audience will take a step back in order to appreciate the narrative, the monster and its power, or the performance as a work of art; in short, to appreciate the aesthetics of horror.

A similar notion of rational engagement can be found in the second theory addressed by Hills: the concept of the fantastic, as described by Tzvetan Todorov. Defining the fantastic as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event,"[12] Todorov follows his definition with an analysis of what occurs after this hesitation passes:

> At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous.[13]

As can be seen from these descriptions, audience emotion is left out of the equation, as, like the cognitivists, Todorov's ideas focus on the presence of and engagement with aesthetic distance in a similar way. As will be discussed later on, however, such an approach is problematic in a reading of performance horror.

Finally, Hills addresses psychoanalysis and considers Sigmund Freud and his ideas of the uncanny. Freud describes how "[t]here is no doubt that [the uncanny] belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread"[14] and that "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar."[15] According to Freud, the unknown can be seen as always frightening, but even stronger is the fear that springs from the uncanny, from that which was once familiar but has now become alien. When these fears of the unknown are repressed, according to Freud, they lead to a contamination of the unconscious, ultimately resulting in psychological turmoil:

> [I]f psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse—of whatever kind—is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among

> those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny.[16]

By allowing for a return of the repressed, a controlled experience of the repressed emotions (and possible unconscious, unwanted desires), a feeling of catharsis can occur. Thus cleansed from any unnatural emotions or urges, a person can once again return to the existing order.

As can be seen from this brief overview, each theory raises certain questions when discussed in the light of performance horror, in particular in relation to the issues of control and distance. In the case of Carroll, Shaw, and Todorov, audiences are required to assess the material presented to them through the lens of rational thought and aesthetic distance. I would like to argue, however, that it is questionable whether this is always an option in terms of performance horror. Many of the stage plays make use of a detailed narrative that allows for moments of curiosity and disclosure: the 1987 play *The Woman in Black*,[17] for example, offers its audience a ghost story as a mystery to be solved. Who is the eponymous Woman, and why does her appearance act as the harbinger of death? Several modern titles, however, move away from this model. Two 2010 plays, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*,[18] create a model of direct address, with a single performer speaking to and interacting with the audience, even bringing volunteers onstage. As a result, the audience is brought much closer to the action. In the case of both scare attractions and zombie events, the story takes a backseat in order to allow for an experience of effects as participants are accosted by the creatures lurking inside. For them, it is simply impossible to sit back and take a good, long look. Often, groups of visitors are literally chased through the venue with performers urging them to run from room to room and they are thus kept from expressing any form of appreciation. A second possibility is the simple fact that a visitor might not want to stay and examine the displays, as they are frightened and want to get out, and even Carroll himself draws attention to this: "One supposes that fascination would be too great a luxury to endure, if one, against all odds, were to encounter a horrific monster in 'real life.'"[19] Matt Hills offers more detail on this point as, he argues, it makes sense to "consider the possibility that audiences do not always cognitively 'master' or intellectually 'resolve' a text. Instead, they may be 'mastered' by a text, that is, allowing themselves to be open to the knowing, game-playing manipulations of an aesthetic artefact."[20] Although audiences are expected to feel similar sensations and emotions when experiencing other horror media, in particular film, Hills' argument on the possibility of being mastered by the aesthetic artefact seems to be extremely likely when read in terms of the direct and intense experience of a live event, where the audience is an active part of the action, rather than a passive spectator.

Although Freud's analysis of the uncanny is rooted in emotion rather than rationality, his ideas on the feeling of catharsis are similarly problematic as it is ultimately unclear whether fears can indeed be lightened in such a way. As Berys Gaut argues, "[horror] films not infrequently leave (and are designed to leave) a lingering sense of fearfulness in their audience [...] This is precisely the opposite effect one would expect if one's fear had been lightened."[21] Indeed, this characteristic has becoming a defining feature of many recent genre films, and I would argue that this sensation is even stronger in the context of performance horror due to the liveness of the event. Through the elimination of control and distance, any degree of separation between audience and monster is removed. This lends a new level of reality to the terrors the participants are exposed to and raises the question as to whether fear can really be lightened when the audience's worst fears are encountered in the flesh.

The nature of these entertainments, combined with the concept of liveness and its impact on the experience, dictate both the responses from an audience and the way in which the form of performance horror needs to be analyzed. Part of this consists of issues that have already been hinted at, namely, the difference in experience between media such as novels and films, and performance. The plot is of primary importance in both literature and film, as is the delivery: each element is positioned carefully and deliberately in order to create maximum affect, with the use of symbolism and metaphor further emphasizing certain scenes and themes. Indeed, story and narrative mode are at the center of the experience, yet they are handled differently in the case of live action horror. Not only is an audience placed in closer proximity to the performance, but they are exposed to and thus experience the story in a different way, and it will be helpful to examine these differences in more detail.

Definitions of narrative often seem straightforward, yet they can easily become complicated when discussed in the light of performance events. An example is the following definition, coined by Paul Cobley, who states that "'Narrative' is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place."[22] This emphasis on the process of telling is echoed by Porter Abbott: "[N]arrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse; story is an event or sequence of events (the action); and narrative discourse is those events as represented."[23] Both authors state that narrative consists of a means of getting a story across, rather than simply the events that take place. Narrative is story, but it is also representation; it is *how* a story is being told. It is this element that will be important here, as many horror entertainments do not possess a plot or storyline in the traditional sense. Instead, they rely on other means to convey the story as patrons are introduced to a premise ("Vampires haunt this old mansion") and subsequently exposed to the experience.

Yet despite the fact that scripts may be missing from some productions, this does not mean that they cannot be read in any way. As I have hinted, performance can draw on many channels of communication, and rather than relying on the use of words and verbal clues, the visual elements of these

experiences will become more important within this context. Of particular relevance here is the work of Antonin Artaud in relation to his Theater of Cruelty. In many of his writings, Artaud emphasizes the affect performance should have on its spectators and in his work, he rejects what he calls theatre-as-mimesis. Instead, he argues, theatre should be like life, or even surpass reality, so as to create emotion in its spectators:

> This is the *human* anxiety the spectators must feel when they come out. They will be shaken and irritated by the inner dynamism of the production taking place before their eyes. The dynamism will be directly related to the anxiety and the preoccupations of their entire lives.[24]

Artaud is very concerned with those features that set theatre apart from, in his words, writing, and this is a theme that keeps emerging in his work:

> What seems to me a first truth above all is this: in order for theatre, an independent autonomous art, to be revived, or simply to stay alive, it must clearly indicate what differentiates it from the script, from pure speech, literature and all other predetermined, written methods.[25]

Instead, "I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language."[26] The language of theatre, according to Artaud, is a specific one, one made up of many different languages:

> The question we are faced with is of allowing theatre to discover its true language, spatial language, gestural language, language of attitudes, expressions and mime, language of cries and onomatopoeia, an acoustic language where all the objective elements will end up as either visual or aural signs, but which have as much intellectual weight and palpable meaning as the language of words.[27]

This language finds its place in the *mise en scène*, which Artaud describes as "taking this word in its broadest sense, regarding it as the language of everything which can be 'put-on-the-stage.'"[28] It is the features that only theatre possesses that, according to Artaud, should be the focus, and only through the rejection of script in favor of the total language of theatre can performance be created. It is this emphasis on using all elements of the *mise en scène* that makes Artaud's theory so important to this discussion. Upon examination of many instances of performance horror, it quickly becomes apparent that the use of scripted dialogue, or indeed, any spoken word, is not as vital as it would be in traditional productions, or is even dispensed with in

favor of (very few) improvised lines. Rather, it is up to all other elements, the space, the costume, the props, the lighting and location, to convey the story to the audience and instill them with fear. Even in more traditional stage plays, such as the ghost stories portrayed in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* (2010),[29] the appearance and various manifestations of the ghostly presence are at the core of the action. It is the haunting the audience has come to see; it is the monster that they have come to see. The emphasis on the other languages of theatre, in particular the visual, is also at the center of most scare attractions. In 2009, New York's Nightmare Haunted House used the theme of vampires to underpin its Halloween season, with an event styled around the MoVA, or Museum of Vampyric Artifacts. Inviting spectators to experience its scares at night, Nightmare also opened its doors during the day to allow audiences to tour the museum during the day.[30] In each of these cases, it is elements other than the script that greatly impact the overall experience.

Yet these concepts of theatrical narrative do not only define the delivery, but also the way in which an audience navigates and experiences performance horror events. In order to explain this, it will be helpful for a moment to use videogames as an example of another medium where story and script can become (and can easily be perceived as) inferior to its other elements. Rather than a fully-fledged narrative, videogames often offer a different kind of experience, telling its story through (inter)action. This may lead to questions regarding its narrative content, yet as Torben Grodal argues, "that some stories are rather simple in some dimensions is not a reason for depriving them of their status as stories."[31] When involved in playing a game, according to Marie-Laure Ryan, the audience is immersed in the plot, and becomes part of the "embedded narrative," which "connects two narrative levels: the story to be discovered, and the story of their discovery."[32] Often, videogames offer narrative choices to the player, creating a situation where the plot as it is represented consists of more than one storyline, and where interaction with the world of the game and the elements found therein (sound, visuals, and other characters) define the experience. By playing the game, the audience members partake in and create their own narrative, and it is only in this way that the story is created, as is argued by Grodal:

> The reader/viewer of "traditional" mediated stories needs only to activate some general cognitive skills, including the ability to have some expectations. The story will proceed even without such expectations. The computer story, in contrast, is only developed by the player's active participation, and the player needs to possess a series of specific skills to "develop" the story.[33]

Although it could be argued that novels and films require a similar kind of investment on the part of a consumer in order for them to partake in what the medium has to offer, Grodal's statement offers an interesting starting point for

a discussion on performance horror. Indeed, the idea of a constructed and embedded narrative like those of videogames, where the audience is actively participating in and discovering the story which draws on all features of the form, is a technique employed by many live action horror events.

As a result, some attention will need to be paid to the way in which an audience can engage with these entertainments, in particular in relation to the immersive elements of the productions. In her work on immersive theatre, Josephine Machon identifies a number of central features of immersive practice:

> These are, firstly, the involvement of the audience, ensuring that the function and experience of the audience evolves according to the methodologies of immersive practice. Secondly, within the experience, there is a prioritisation of the sensual world that is unique to each immersive event. Thirdly, the significance of space and place is a key concern of such practice.[34]

In this way, Machon sets out the key features of immersive performance and offers a starting point for a discussion and methodology for analysis. In addition, these features are mapped across what Machon calls a "scale of immersivity":

> Across this scale, we can acknowledge a continuum of responses required from an audience member that are attributable to the ways in which an event exploits sensory elements or incorporates corporeal aspects in the design and "delivery" of the work."[35]

Not only are the features of the production of importance, but also how and to what degree they are used in the work, and thus how they will influence the experience of the audience.

When looking at performance horror, then, I would like to suggest a similar approach of isolating key features that can be described and analyzed in some detail for each form and to identify which aspects of the event can and need to be read. In terms of live action horror, the task will be to isolate and consider the different elements that constitute the performance and to judge if, and how, these help build towards an emotional affect that can influence the experience.

Firstly, any scripted elements are obviously significant: the back story or central theme of the production, the script itself, and any textual sources inside the venue. It is here that the more traditional applications of horror theory can be of the most use, although it should be noted that the experience of a text will be different in performance as opposed to being read, as the delivery of text through a performer creates an additional mediation. Furthermore, in

these kinds of horror entertainments, actions will not only be described, but also shown: a moving statue or a maniac with a chainsaw are more than simple sentences; they are live, they are life, and in a way reality, if only a staged imitation of reality. Examples of this can be found in the tension between scripted performance such as *The Woman in Black* (the full text of which can be purchased and studied)[36] to the emphasis on audience interaction and improvisation that is prevalent in most scare attractions. In the London Dungeons, for example, scenes will be staged and themed, incorporating historical figures such as Jack the Ripper.[37] When encountering the actors within the venue, they will often interact with visitors, questioning or asking them to volunteer and participate in parts of the performance. The result is still a text, but one which is much more anecdotal, thus requiring a different approach.

Yet it is not just a script that is part of the show or the only means to convey the narrative; other elements need to be considered that can trigger affective emotion. Whereas some aspects of a performance are directed or only played out in a section of a space, as described by Ross Brown,

> [S]ound [...] whatever events the sources of the individual sounds might represent, is *in totum* an immersive environment. One cannot stand back from it and see the entire picture; one's aural attention does not have the equivalent of sightlines; the theatrical mode of listening does not gaze uniformly, but is, by nature, a state of continual omnidirectional distraction.[38]

This omnipresence of sound, as described by Brown, results in an interesting dynamic in terms of control and distance. Whereas a spectator can (in theory) stand back from a performance, hide behind others, or shut their eyes to avoid seeing images of pain and violence, the nature of sound as an immersive environment allows no escape. One might be able to cover one's ears, yet the nature and distribution of sound means that one is still surrounded, as opposed to being able to turn away and completely shut it out. Although sound clearly has a large role to play in other horror media, in particular film, the lack of distance between the audience and performance in live action horror means that this feature is likely to have a bigger impact on the experience. The impact of film sound may be similar, but will always have a single origin, whereas sound in perhaps can physically surround the spectator, sneaking up on them and overwhelming them from any direction. In this way, the use of sound, both focused and omnidirectional, can provide interesting insights into the means by which an audience can be scared. This effect is accurately described by Theo van Leeuwen: "Sound never just 'expresses' or 'represents', it always also, and at the same time, affects us."[39] A clear example of this is the production of *Play Dead*, where blackouts are used throughout the play. At certain moments during the performance, the audience is plunged into

completely darkness, left to be guided only by the voice of the performer onstage, and the sounds of whatever else might be lurking in the auditorium with them.

Like sound, space is equally omnidirectional: according to Gaston Bachelard, a space can be experienced in "a state of suspended reading," invoking a variety of emotional responses:

> It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature and poetry that we "write a room", "read a room", or "read a house." Thus, very quickly, [...] the reader who is "reading a room" leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past.[40]

The expectations one might have of horror ask for dark caverns, gloomy castles, and abandoned dungeons, filled with monsters. Similarly, Western cultural history may add a resonance to buildings and places: a horror event staged in a church will have a different feel than the same performance repeated in a designated theatre space, which can have a significant impact on the way in which it is experienced by its audience. Spaces for horror can be theatrical; created for the event; converted from practical sewer to intricate maze; they can have a mythology added (monsters and corpses were found in these very corridors) or taken away (once a church, it is now only a husk). A traditional theatre space can be transformed through use of actors (such as the appearance of the Actor and the Woman in the auditorium in *The Woman in Black*) or design (as in *Ghost Stories*, where not only the stage itself, but the auditorium and the rest of the theatre are included in the production design).[41] By contrast, zombie events such as *2.8 Hours Later* guide participants around urban environments, transforming the space of the city into the site of the zombie apocalypse.[42] As such, the reasons behind the choice and treatment of a space will thus form a significant part of each analysis.

In addition to the use of space, the travel to a space has a resonance of its own. As stated by Richard Schechner, "too little study has been made of how people—both spectators and performers—get to, and into, the performance space; how do they go away from that space? In what ways are gathering/dispersing related to preparation/cooling off?"[43] Similarly, the question as to how and how far people travelled to the event may influence the experience, as is noted by Susan Bennett: "[O]utside the larger urban centres, limited access to theatre will undoubtedly change an audience's sense of the theatrical event."[44] The area in which the venue is located will equally have an effect on the overall experience, and not only can the journey to a venue thus create a feeling of nervous anticipation in an audience: many events have a pre-show experience in place in order to prepare a visitor for what they will encounter inside.

Lastly, and also related to the pre-performance experience, is the use of marketing materials: how are the events framing themselves and how does this

affect a potential visitor? In his essay "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance," Marvin Carlson draws attention to this aspect of the performance: "Programs often include sketches, literary quotations, or photographs not directly related to the play, but suggesting a preferred interpretive strategy."[45] He continues:

> The response theory concept of the "model reader" or "implied reader" has particular relevance here—before ever entering the theatre, or even buying a ticket, that reader must be targeted and sought by appropriate publicity.[46]

Flyers handed out to attract visitors to scare attractions often include images of bloody dismemberment, focusing on the violent and monstrous side. By contrast, events such as traditional plays favor more muted images, evoking a feeling of mystery and dread rather than horror. As Carlson states, "what an audience brings to the theatre in the way of expectations, assumptions, and strategies [...] will creatively interact with the stimuli of the theatre event to produce whatever effect the performance has on an audience and what effect the audience has upon it."[47] Types of viral marketing are common in the horror genre, with films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007) as notable examples, and performance horror is no exception in this trend. As such, it will be helpful to consider all influences, both within, before and after the performance to try and create a complete analysis of the way in which the performance itself is experienced.

At this point, little work has been undertaken on a close reading of horror and contemporary popular performance. As I have shown, existing models on the study of horror do not readily apply to this form and some of the questions asked by the field, most notably the "why horror" query, are best avoided in favor of an examination of a number of performance horror's experiences. The theoretical model presented here can serve as the starting point for the exploration of a number of live-action horror events, each of which present a different challenge in terms of design. Using Morreall's concepts of control and distance as a basis, one can start looking at a variety of case studies ranging from traditional theatre to highly immersive zombie events, charting the position of the audience and the way in which the features of performance are used to create a unique and horrifying experience.

All of the productions discussed here use the past of horror, yet in doing so, they create something that is unmistakeably distinctive, where each performance draws on the rich traditions of the genre to offer the audience a unique experience. Unique, indeed, they are, as well as constantly changing and developing. What has been offered for reflection here is a snapshot of performance horror, what it is, what it can be, and how it should be approached. With the advent of new media, from stage to screen and beyond, horror has often been at the forefront of its development. It is this success of the genre, and of the form of performance horror in particular, that raises the

question as to whether these performances may safely be placed in a niche, or are they part of an ongoing process of horror taking centre stage? Can we ignore what lurks in the dark, lest it will come and get us?

Notes

[1] Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 7.
[2] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 2008), 112.
[3] Emma McEvoy, "Contemporary Gothic Theatre," in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, eds. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 215.
[4] Ibid., 220.
[5] John Morreall, "Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions," *Philosophy and Literature* 9.1 (1985): 97.
[6] Ibid., 97.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Isabel Cristina Pinedo, "Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 106–7.
[9] Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London: Continuum, 2005), 23.
[10] Daniel Shaw, "Power, Horror and Ambivalence," in *Film and Philosophy: Horror Special Edition*, ed. Daniel Shaw, 2001) n.pag.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.
[13] Ibid., 41.
[14] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), 123.
[15] Ibid., 124.
[16] Ibid., 147.
[17] Stephen Mallatratt, *The Woman in Black: A Ghost Play* (London: Samuel French Ltd., 1989). See also: http://www.thewomaninblack.com/.
[18] *Ghost Stories*: http://www.ghoststoriestheshow.co.uk/; Todd Robbins Teller, *Play Dead* (copy of script obtained from author), 2010.
[19] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or: Paradox of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 189.
[20] Ibid., 44.
[21] Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33.4 (1993): 336.
[22] Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5–6.
[23] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19.
[24] Claude Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre* (Rev. ed.) (London: Methuen, 2001), 32; emphasis in original.
[25] Ibid., 124.
[26] Ibid., 103.
[27] Ibid., 75.
[28] Ibid., 77.

[29] Mallatratt, *The Woman in Black*; Hugh Janes, *The Haunting* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010). See also: http://www.kenwright.com/index.php?id=1154; http://hughjanes.co.uk/haunting.php.
[30] Nightmare NYC: http://hauntedhousenyc.com/. General coverage: http://observer.com/2009/09/only-in-new-york-museum-of-vampyric-artifacts-opens-haunted-house/; on the separate opening of the MoVA: http://www.iscareyou.com/2009/08/improvements-in-nightmare-this-year-pt.html.
[31] Torben Grodal, "Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video Games, Media, and Embodied Experiences," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, eds. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), 147.
[32] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Beyond *Ludus*: Narrative, Videogames and the Split Condition of Digital Textuality," in *Videogame, Player, Text*, eds. Barry Atkins and Tanya Krzywinska (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 16.
[33] Grodal, "Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles," 139.
[34] Machon, *Immersive Theatres*, 70.
[35] Ibid., 70.
[36] Mallatratt, *The Woman in Black*.
[37] The Dungeons Franchise: http://www.thedungeons.com/.
[38] Ross Brown, *Sound* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 132; emphasis in original.
[39] Theo van Leeuwen, *Speech, Music, Sound* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 128.
[40] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 14.
[41] Mallatratt, *The Woman in Black: A Ghost Play*. *Ghost Stories*.
[42] *2.8 Hours Later*: http://2.8hourslater.com/; http://www.slingshoteffect.co.uk/
[43] Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies* (2nd ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2003), 190.
[44] Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (2nd ed.). (New York: Routledge, 1997), 102.
[45] Carlson, Marvin. "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance", *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie. (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 1993), 91.
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[47] Ibid., 97.

Placing Horror: An Interdisciplinary Investigation

Katherine A. Wagner
University of Louisville

There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in…
~Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*[1]

Hill House. The Bate's Motel. Camp Crystal Lake. 'Salem's Lot. The horror genre is peppered with iconic places that, often despite their fictionality, continue to skulk in our collective minds. Yet too often it seems as though horror scholarship—excluding some important and notable exceptions—relegates place to the minimal or limited function of setting or to a supporting role in service of "bigger" issues. Thus, I propose a more nuanced approach to horror research and analysis, one that fosters a deeper investigation of place. Such an investigation demands an interdisciplinary approach, one that juxtaposes diverse corpora of theory and media such as textual analysis (examination of narrative, visual, and structural elements); cultural theory (exploration of the operational systems that shape culture and its inhabitants); and humanistic/human geography (inquiry into the geographical experiences of individuals and communities). The multifaceted and interdisciplinary potential for such a place-based paradigm for horror scholarship is nearly limitless, as it can offer both new avenues for exploration and breathe fresh life into current discussions.

The main objective of this essay is to offer a place-based model for horror research that is reliant upon a more interdisciplinary methodology. For this reason, in this essay I purposefully avoid in-depth close readings of specific horror texts as such readings would not facilitate the primary objective of this essay: to explore possible future avenues for examination. Instead I try to offer brief analyses and suggestions of how certain facets of place open up new possibilities for explorations into horror. This essay is intended to help foster a

conversation about how more developed, interdisciplinary approaches to place can transform horror scholarship. To understand these future avenues, though, it is necessary to know the field as it presently stands; the best conversations are those that first acknowledge their place within the larger, ongoing discussion.

Someone surveying horror scholarship might not feel a noticeable gap where discussions of place should exist. This is because scholars do talk about places and settings in horror. Brief introductions to the genre, such as those written by Gina Wisker or Paul Wells, review settings and places key to the genre and of importance to certain texts.[2] Long-respected critics weave issues of place into their larger discussions. Robin Wood, building toward his argument about American horror themes in the 1970s, argues that the 1943 film *I Walked with a Zombie* "explicitly locates horror at the heart of the family."[3] Crafting his definition of art-horror, Noël Carroll proposes that "the geography of horror stories generally situates the origin of monsters […] to places outside of and/or unknown to the human world."[4] Carol J. Clover suggests a significant and gender-coded component of the slasher film is the Terrible Place, the term she coins to describe the often dank, "intrauterine" place where the Final Girl must confront the killer.[5] There may not be a book entitled *Horror and Place*, but there are many scholarly works written about specific places within horror.

Furthermore, there is quite a bit of existing scholarship on places and settings within the Gothic genre, a genre that so many feel must be linked, if not entirely tied, to modern horror. The 2004 *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* devotes several pages to explaining and defining the Gothic setting and its larger metaphorical significance.[6] Gothic scholars not only point to the generic motif of certain places, but they often sub-divide the genre into categories shaped by place: domestic Gothic, American Gothic, Southern Gothic, postcolonial Gothic, rural Gothic. These divisions reveal more than geographical predilections; they highlight how scholars imbue value to the places of Gothic texts. Intriguingly, this priority of place does not seem to transfer fully over to the studies of horror that seek to move beyond the Gothic.

Although a survey of horror scholarship might not reveal a noticeable "place"-sized gap in the scholarship, neither does such a survey divulge the thriving and vital conversations and critical analyses that one would expect based on how thoroughly place seems to permeate the horror genre. Often within scholarly explorations of horror, place is constrained to the limited purpose of a tool needed to expose the "real" issues, to excavate the primary areas of emphasis. For example, Barbara Creed explores the problematic boundaries of inside/outside; however, these concepts are referenced almost exclusively in relation to the concept of the monstrous, abject womb in horror.[7] Wood and Carroll—as discussed earlier—both reference place, but again primarily as building blocks for their larger respective objectives. These are suitable, scholarly uses of place; nevertheless, repeatedly positioning place

into the margins or allowing it to fade into the background ignores the rich potential and multifaceted nature of place. Likewise, viewing place within the framework of literary and cinematic setting is not unto itself problematic; confining place to this role, however, underutilizes the sophisticated nature of place.

Scholarship that more fully acknowledges the intricacies of place within horror is not entirely absent, albeit perhaps still relatively nascent. Bernice M. Murphy, to date, has published three monographs on how different places fill the junctures between American horror and the Gothic narrative.[8] Edited collections such as *Horror International* and *Transnational Horror across Visual Media* reveal a burgeoning emphasis on global and transnational horror.[9] Many of the essays in these anthologies, such as Steffen Hantke's study of German serial killer films and Kirsten Strayer's examination of the interplay of national and international identities in art-house and exploitation films, postulate how globalizing forces affect the horror genre's construction of places.[10] Yet as these investigations reveal, there is also still so much left to explore when it comes to place and horror. The complexities of place can only be unveiled through rigorous and genuinely interdisciplinary explorations that acknowledge the physical, cultural, and social facets of place. What I am advocating for in this essay is a methodology that seeks to not just bridge, but perhaps even amalgamate the existing horror scholarship (itself comprising of many disciplinary perspectives) with the characteristically interdisciplinary examinations into place. Because my objective here is to highlight the potential value of a place-based paradigm of horror research, this essay may seem to be primarily engaged with questions of place. Do not, however, be fooled; as is often the case, horror is lurking just beneath the surface of things. And things, as it turns out, are in place.

Places are all around. They are physically-defined structures, socially and culturally-mediated ideas, and psychological constructs. They are both concrete and abstract, capable of being fixed and fluid, and connected to both thought and practice. Humans need place. It is through this infusion of human belonging, attachment, and investment that undefined space transforms into meaningful place.[11] Engagements with place help create a sense of identity because humans not only exist in places, they need and want places to believe in, to connect with, to value, and simply to call their own. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, for good or for ill, places shape human experiences. Humanist geographer Edward Relph writes:

> [Places] are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties. Indeed our relationships with places are just as necessary, varied, and sometimes perhaps just as unpleasant as our relationships with other people.[12]

And as with all affairs, these relationships with place are experienced on multiple, often simultaneous levels and through a variety of affordances. To grasp fully the role of place within humans' lives, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that physical and mental interactions, personal and cultural identities, and social practices all work together to help form place.

Places are (or at least can be) concretely-defined locations, or sites in space,[13] wherein certain activities are situated. Many literary and cinematic works of horror emphasize this dimension of place through their focus on familiar physical places such as hotels, cabins, and homes. Yet these are more than mere settings. These physical places demand understandings of the relationships between architecture, psychology, identity, and cultural beliefs. Scholarship on specific physical places, such as existing research on the house/home, reveals certain tensions and assumptions that play into expectations about a variety of issues such as family, gender, success, private/public spheres, and social boundaries.[14] Thus home invasion narratives—a standard of the horror genre—demonstrate more than physical dissolution of borders; they also break, or at least problematize, certain cultural and social expectations, myths, and beliefs connected to the home. Similarly, horror narratives in which natural locations (e.g., parks, forests, deserts, lakes) are endangered or in turn are sources of terror often wrestle with larger cultural and social issues, making such portrayals of nature perfect venues for further ecocritical and environmental studies.

Importantly, examinations of physical places—both man-made and natural—need not be limited to literary and cinematic investigations of horror. Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson's monograph-length study on the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol demonstrates how social connotations of the macabre and the taboo can become linguistically and culturally synonymous with the literal physical place wherein certain horrific events and experiences are ritualistically and theatrically performed.[15] The landscapes of horror bled into other, less narrative-driven art forms as well. Using a Paul Cezanne painting as his first example, John Wylie begins his study *Landscape* with the bold statement: "Landscape is tension."[16] The title of Anselm Kiefer's 1980 painting *Horror Vacui* is evocative, calling to mind both the literal definition (a horror of empty space) and the artistic term used to describe the impulse to cover all available surfaces of a piece with detail and design.[17] Kiefer's painting captures this dual meaning through its primarily gray and nearly relentless, corner-to-corner depiction of a down-trod mass of broken people. The painting exudes a tension, one keenly felt by the lack of a recognizable relationship between the subjects of the painting and the landscape. There is nothing familiar or comforting about the physical place depicted on the canvas. This lack of place within this painting is more than disorienting; it is horrifying as it—like so many other horror texts—systematically strips away the sense of identity and understanding traditionally offered through place.

Horror Vacui produces tension by preventing the landscape from fulfilling its often-customary role of connecting perceptions of self, body, and land.

Normally, bodies provide locational cues like up, down, far, away; they also shape places simply by inhabiting them. Approaching place from a phenomenological perspective, noted philosopher, cultural theorist, and humanist geographer Edward S. Casey posits that the corporeal body is a critical vehicle for engaging with place,[18] in part because "we find ourselves in the midst of places we already know thanks to the intimate link between their abiding familiarity and our own corporeal habituality."[19] Much of the existing scholarship on phenomenology and horror is, unsurprisingly, engaged in readings of certain authors or specific literary and cinematic texts. Yet this focus on the body's reaction to and encounter with place as a physical construct offers intriguing possibilities for horror scholarship that moves beyond traditional, textual analyses even while drawing from familiar theories. The uncanny remains a popular way of contextualizing, in particular, zombies and their continued repulsive allure as something terrifying unfamiliar in their familiarity. Yet there is a component of the uncanny that is also undeniably linked to place. "Time and again," Dylan Trigg writes, "it is the sense of being *lost* in place that is invoked through the experience of the uncanny" [emphasis in the original].[20] Such feelings of being lost can be literal or figurative, the uncanny experience of visiting a place familiar in memory or nostalgia but not in its current form. A phenomenological approach, grounded in the potentially uncanny relationships between the body and place, could enrich research on the phenomenon of how tours of real-world haunted places and professional interactions with these places (such as ghost-hunters and séances) craft specific narratives of horror. Likewise, the recent swell in the popularity and presence of Halloween haunts and mazes is a fertile area for further investigation into the relationship between the bodily effects of horror and the bodily engagements with intentionally-crafted "horrific" places that purposefully seek to make one feel lost and disoriented.

As these possible research areas illustrate, the body's interactions with place are significant on more than just a physical level. The body fosters the link between place and the self, the "agency and identity of the geographical subject."[21] Questions of agency—the ability to make choices and be responsible for the consequences of those decisions—are at the core of game studies. In her examination of horror video games, Tanya Krzywinska argues that there is a correlation between the game's articulation of the virtual world, the player's sense of agency, and her potential emotional and physical responses.[22] Video games, for example, that offer first-person shooter perspective (e.g., the *Left 4 Dead* franchise) will create a different virtual spatial relationship—one perhaps more akin to real-world body-place interactions—than games with a visible third-person avatar (e.g., the *Resident Evil* franchise).

Although much more research needs to be conducted on game affect and gamer response, these different ways of reacting to virtual bodies and places seem to offer real-world physiological and psychological responses, creating potential feelings of tension, fright, and even claustrophobia and vertigo. Often these latter sensations are produced through a disruption or

manipulation of the game's interactivity formed through the links between a gamer's agency and the virtual game space. Thus, when the connections between body and place are severed—or at least impaired—the consequences extend far beyond a physical disconnection. Elaine Scarry claims that "intense pain […] destroys a person's self and world" and is furthermore capable of being "language-destroying; as the content of one's world disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject."[23] A body in pain is a body that is unable to connect fully to place. And there are endless bodies in pain within the horror genre.

Trauma studies is a frequent bedfellow of horror scholarship because, as Linnie Blake argues,

> The generically specific conventions of horror allow not only for the narrativised, symbolised or otherwise encoded articulation of hitherto repressed individual and national experiences of trauma but demand audience response through a form of genre-specific interpellation.[24]

Bryan Bertino's 2008 *The Strangers* is a slasher film that speaks to the physical trauma of torture, but it also addresses an emotional trauma experienced when symbolic places in our lives are destroyed.[25] Philip L. Simpson argues that the film nostalgically repurposes familiar elements of the 1970s-style slasher film in order to explore key cultural anxieties, specifically employing the motiveless serial killer trope to "work through fear of home(land) invasion in the post-9/11 culture."[26] Bertino admits that he sought:

> [To] find a house that your brother could have lived in, and your father could have lived in, you could have grown up in. And the way we lit it, the colors we picked, were all trying to find something comforting, trying to find something inviting, so that we could destroy that."[27]

As the main characters of the film are increasingly emotionally and physically terrorized by the titular strangers, they discover that their seemingly secure and safe home(land) is actually an all-access playground for a sadistic trio of outsiders. The film mirrors the destruction of the characters' world with cinematic decisions that disrupt the viewers' sense of place. There is an intentional discontinuity between the film's early establishing shots of the physical distance between the summer house and the supposedly-safe barn and the couple's perception of that spatial distance while they are being hunted. The strangers seem to have access to the home that extends beyond the entrances and exits shown earlier in the film; furthermore, their appearances and disappearances seem to defy the realities of their spaces. *The Strangers* reveals a horrific truth: the destructions of the places of our past often ensures the destruction of our futures.

Contextualizing *The Strangers* within a post-9/11 framework reveals the extent to which the body's connections to place extend beyond geographical or corporeal significance; place affects cultural understandings as well. For this reason, many humanist geographers look at how place shapes and is shaped by constructions and cultural interpretations of gender and the sexed body.[28] Gender and feminist studies of place neatly emphasize how places become critical sites for the reception, production, and dissemination of knowledge and cultural understandings. Existing places directly influence how people articulate ideas, affect how people hear and process communicated thoughts, and even control how people view what can or cannot be expressed.[29] Tim Cresswell suggests that this power of place extends to the assessment of whether or not certain behaviors are culturally appropriate, normative or transgressive, or "that which is in place to that which is out of place."[30] He explains that the term "outsider" not only describes someone new or unfamiliar with a place, but it also designates an individual who "does not properly understand the behavior expected of people in a town, region, or nation. Outsiders are often despised and suspected of being troublemakers. They are people 'out of place.'"[31] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen proposes that it is possible to better understand a culture by examining the monsters they endure. He suggests that, at its most fundamental, the monster "is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us […] an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond."[32] Places create and offer boundaries that can provide both a sense of belonging and a sense of exclusion. These boundaries help differentiate and interpret the individuals, groups, actions, and information that exist within and outside of certain places. Within the horror genre, these boundaries help to distinguish between the monsters and the humans, the threatening and the threatened.

Through its ability to govern a sense of me/you, us/them, self/Other, place—or, perhaps more accurately, a sense of place—is a nonpareil feature of belonging. The pervasive role that place plays in constructions of identity is worth considering when visiting and revisiting the destructions of places (and identities) present within many horror texts, such as Stephen King's groundbreaking 1974 novel *Carrie*. The first manifestations of Carrie White's powers in conjunction with the start of her menstrual cycle is an iconic scene; caught unawares while in the locker room, Carrie believes she is dying when she sees her blood. The other girls, however, only see an easy victim for their near-pathological hatred of this social pariah. The idea of belonging and place implicit throughout the novel is sharply brought into focus when, after Carrie's power short-circuits the locker room lights, King writes that it felt as though "the whole damn place is falling in."[33] Ultimately, the entire novel is about the consummate outsider whose mastery of her powers leads to the systematic destruction of the places (and people) in her life.

The places that Carrie destroys—such as her school and her home—are clearly linked, not only to Carrie but to one another. Together they are part of a larger system of places (namely the town), that—in a thousand different

ways—ostracized Carrie and denied her a sense of belonging. This novel demonstrates how places are not necessarily solitary units, confined and segregated from other places. "Rather," as John A. Agnew suggests, "they are usually and perhaps increasingly in a globalized world located in a series of extensive economic, political, and cultural *networks* with varying geographical scope" [emphasis in the original].[34] Although, as John Connell and Chris Gibson admit, conversations in geography rarely mention music, world music is nevertheless a perfect vehicle for exploring a complex and occasionally contentious system of places that exist perpetually between the local and global, the exotic and mundane.[35] The "music in horror film frequently makes us feel threatened and uncomfortable"[36] perhaps because it can expose additional senses to the harmonies and disharmonies of place.

Especially within a postmodern and globalized world, many of these harmonies and disharmonies connect to issues of mobility and movement. Although mobility is often desirable to commuters, travelers, and other itinerants, such freedoms are not without consequence. Through their discussions of the conflicts, invasions, disjunctures, and uncertainties inherent to these modes of place-movement, existing scholarship in the field of cultural tourism and travel reveals a frequent rhetoric of fear, terror, and horror.[37] Travel and tourism, unsurprisingly then, are motifs found in countless horror genre texts.[38] The dangerously open road, deadly clashes between nature and technology, the ominous presence of the "authentic" native culture, and the horrific fate of the (usually) American tourist all center on questions of place and the possibly fragile nature of our places.

Transnational and international negotiations and appropriations of shared markets, production sites, and methods of distribution heighten many of these existing tensions about place and mobility. Christina Klein argues that the horror genre is directly affected by the homogenizing patterns of globalization as the national and cultural identities of horror texts become increasingly muted and indistinguishable.[39] Despite a narrative emphasis on their US settings, many horror projects—including the TV shows *The X-Files* and *Supernatural*—are actually "runaway productions," shoots filmed outside of Hollywood and often entirely outside of the US. Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher suggest that these "runaway productions" often produce "considerable angst" not only for those who find themselves with out-sourced jobs but also for those who view these productions "as some kind of cultural affront."[40] The idea that "foreign" locations could so easily replace "real" U.S. places (and that conversely other places could so easily be mistaken for the U.S.) is capable of creating cultural anxieties about iconic, authentic, and symbolic landscapes and the identities rooted in these places. These anxieties arguably exist at the heart of the frequent lamentations over the rise of horror remakes and adaptations. Investigations of place allow adaptation studies to move beyond questions of mere fidelity or lack of creativity. For example, studies of transnational remakes and adaptations can reveal the mutability and uncertainty of global places as well as of the global industry of horror itself.[41]

To loosely paraphrase Freud, sometimes a dead body is just a dead body. At other times, however, that dead body (or evil doll or possessed child) becomes a mechanism for engaging with social discourses, ideas, attitudes, and fears. In the words of Stephen King: horror texts "often serve as an extraordinarily accurate barometer of those things which trouble the night-thoughts of a whole society."[42] Nevertheless horror offers more than just a reflection or indication of social moods, fears, and thoughts; it provides a more contained and manageable space in which to negotiate real-world, large-scale complex cultural experiences. "Space," Edward W. Soja maintains, "in itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience."[43] Translation, transformation, and experience indicate performance, progression, and a process of change inherent to social life and fundamental to social space. Yet built into these words is also an acknowledgement of the ongoing interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of identities and places. Louis Althusser reminds his readers that ideology provides people with "the *recognition* that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence" [emphasis in the original].[44] Dominant ideologies tether individual and cultural identities. The horror genre not only exposes these tethers, it often systematically destroys them as well. In the process, the genre manages to whisper perpetually the sinister thought that perhaps one's place in the world is never truly secure, fixed, or safe. If the horror genre serves as a cultural barometer, then place—like the mercury within the instrument—provides a critical marking gauge that cannot and should not be ignored.

Notes

[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 108.
[2] Gina Wisker, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (London: Wallflower, 2000).
[3] Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan…and Beyond*, exp. and rev ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 77.
[4] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34–5.
[5] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 48.
[6] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature: The Essential Guide to the Lives and Works of Gothic Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 158–60.
[7] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 49.
[8] Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bernice M. Murphy, *The Highway Horror Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[9] Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams, eds., *Horror International* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Dana Och and Kirsten Strayer, eds., *Transnational Horror across Visual Media: Fragmented Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[10] Steffen Hantke, "The Dialogue with American Popular Culture in Two German Films about the Serial Killer," in *Horror International*, eds. Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 56–79; Kirsten Strayer, "Art, Horror, and International Identity in 1970s Exploitation Films," in *Transnational Horror across Visual Media: Fragmented Bodies*, eds. Dana Och and Kirsten Strayer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 109–25.
[11] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.
[12] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 141.
[13] A number of humanist geographers (including Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward S. Casey, and Tim Cresswell) offer informative and valuable analyses of the important cultural, philosophical, and practical distinctions between the concepts of space and place.
[14] For a notable review of how different methodologies and perspectives on the home yields important glimpses into countless individual, social, cultural constructions of identity, see Hazel Easthope, "A Place Called Home," *Housing, Theory and Society* 21 (2004): 128–38.
[15] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).
[16] John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.
[17] Anselm Kiefer, *Horror Vacui*, 1980: The Met Museum.
[18] Casey—drawing upon the ideas of scholars like Heidegger, Bourdieu, Lefebvre, and Tuan—discusses the body and place in many of his works, including *The Fate of Place* and in the chapter "Body, Self, and Landscape" in the edited collection *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies.*
[19] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 233.
[20] Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 215.
[21] Edward S. Casey, "Body, Self, and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, eds. Paul C. Adams et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 405.
[22] Tanya Krzywinska, "Hands-On Horror," in "Axes to Grind: Re-Imagining the Horrific in Visual Media and Culture," ed. Harmony Wu, special issue, *Spectator* 22.2 (2002): 12–23.
[23] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35.
[24] Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 13–4.
[25] *The Strangers*, directed by Bryan Bertino (2008; Universal City, CA: Rogue Pictures), DVD.
[26] Philip L. Simpson, "'There's Blood on the Walls': Serial Killing as Post-9/11 Terror in *The Strangers*," in *Murders and Acquisitions: Representations of the Serial Killer in Popular Culture*, ed. Alzena MacDonald (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 188.

[27] "The Elements of Terror," in "Special Features," *The Strangers*, DVD, directed by Bryan Bertino (2008; Universal City, CA: Rogue Pictures).
[28] Scholars such as Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell offer in-depth analyses of feminist perspectives on place and humanist geography.
[29] David N. Livingstone, "Science, Site and Speech: Scientific Knowledge and the Spaces of Rhetoric," *History of the Human Sciences* 20.2 (2007): 71–98.
[30] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 10.
[31] Ibid., 25–6.
[32] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7.
[33] Stephen King, *Carrie* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999), 13.
[34] John A. Agnew, "Space and Place," in *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, eds. John A. Agnew and David N. Livingstone (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 327.
[35] John Connell and Chris Gibson, "World Music: Deterritorializing Place and Identity," *Progress in Human Geography* 28.3 (2004): 342–61.
[36] Neil Lerner, "Preface: Listening to Fear/Listening with Fear," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), ix.
[37] Edited collections—such as *Seductions of Place: Geographical Perspectives on Globalization and Touristed Landscapes*; *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives*; and *Tourism, Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self*—focus on real-world manifestations of travel; however, they also provide frameworks for approaching depictions of tourism and travel within horror.
[38] For a thorough investigation of one subset of this motif, see Bernice M. Murphy, *The Highway Horror Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[39] Christina Klein, "The *American* Horror Film? Globalization and Transnational U.S.-Asian Genres," in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 3–14.
[40] Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher, "Introduction: Catching up to Runaway Productions," in *Contracting Out Hollywood: Runaway Productions and Foreign Location Shooting*, eds. Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher (Lanham: Rowman, 2005), 3.
[41] Daniel Herbert, "Trading Spaces: Transnational Dislocations in *Insomnia/Insomnia* and *Jo-on/The Grudge*," in *Fear, Cultural Anxiety, and Transformation: Horror, Science Fiction, and Fantasy Films Remade*, eds. Scott A. Lukas and John Marmysz (Lanham: Rowman, 2009), 143–64.
[42] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Gallery, 2010), 139.
[43] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 79–80.
[44] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 178.

"Historicizing Lovecraft": The Great War and America's Cosmic Dread

W. Scott Poole
College of Charleston

Placing cosmic terror in history, placing H. P. Lovecraft in history, assumes that horror can interpret the historical and that Lovecraft's intellectual and literary output intertwined with the early twentieth century's modernist moment. Any effort to include a "genre writer" in the great artistic revolt of the early twentieth century cannot exclude the Great War and Lovecraft himself certainly did not ignore its gory monstrosity. Of course, not all scholars will agree to allow a pulp writer into the magic circle of modernism. Lucie Armitt puts it well when she notes that studies of the fantastic always "gesture the reader in with a (direct or indirect) apology." Expect no apology here.[1]

The world of pulp fandom and the fantastic in which Lovecraft chose to do his work unveils how art dealing with the catastrophes and terrors of the early twentieth century found a much larger audience than first encountered Eliot, Woolf, Pound, Stein, and Carlos Williams as they became canonical in college curricula by the forties. Attempting to create a template of modernism or even "modernisms" that will categorize so many diverse efforts in order to understand the cleft in historical experience that came with World War I underscores the limitations of the term modernism itself. Certainly, the elasticity of the conception becomes apparent when we consider how to place a figure such as Lovecraft in relation to it. Norman R. Gayford, in one of the few attempts to read Lovecraft as part of the modernist project, notes the basic complication that "literary modernism actively resists definition." His own attempt to define it shows how recalcitrant, or at least fungible, the term becomes as an analytical tool.[2]

Frank Kermode attempted to solve the problem by writing of "paleomodernism" and "neomodernism." Still, we will shipwreck immediately if we simply try to slip Lovecraft into a category that does, indeed, prove intractable to definition. What would be easier, after all, than to employ a term

so absurdly broad that it could easily include Charlie Chaplin, Ezra Pound, Knut Hamson, and Paul Klee and then drop one more name into it? Although this article makes use of the terms "modernism" and "literary modernism," scare quotes are always implied.[3]

Understanding Lovecraft in relation to modernism requires us to admit the tendentious and fissiparous nature of that movement, the differences between the artists who actively made the movement and experienced its newness. Even as we complicate the term, we cannot ignore the basic similarities between those who drew, painted, wrote, danced, and designed in the ruins of the nineteenth century. A hunger for experience and anger at the "genteel tradition" of the nineteenth century fueled their struggle against all they denominated as "Victorianism." They regarded this set of values as dangerously sentimental and part of the avalanche of stupidity that caused European civilization to place the gun to its temple in the Great War.

Considering H. P. Lovecraft's relationship to the modernist project opens up new vistas of historical inquiry in the story of twentieth-century horror. His influence over contemporary horror culture has become one of the most discussed and least analyzed topics in the massive mountain of material that exists on the once derided author. His most popular monstrosity, dead but dreaming Cthulhu, has arguably become as recognizable as Tod Browning's Dracula or Wes Craven's Freddy Krueger. Comic books, tabletop role-playing games, short and feature films and even console and PC video games have used his fictions as raw material and sources of direct adaptation for almost forty years.[4]

Concurrently, an enclave of scholars, primarily in literary criticism (and a few in philosophy) created an enormous secondary literature on the author once regarded merely as a pulp writer with literary aspirations. Beginning in the late seventies and led by S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz, they published articles through their own journal, *Lovecraft Studies*, while collaborating on edited collections of his correspondence and, in Joshi's case, working to create important bibliographies and authoritative and annotated editions of his work. Joshi also published *I Am Providence*, the most important biography to date of Lovecraft.[5]

The lifelong, ongoing effort of these scholars has paid rich cultural dividends for Lovecraft's literary reputation. Today, *The Library of America* includes him in their collection, alongside his idols Poe and Hawthorne. In early 2016, a major university press released an essay collection that proclaimed "the age of Lovecraft" while *The Times Literary Supplement* in January of 2015 asserted that "Lovecraft has moved from cult writer to cultural phenomenon."[6]

Despite this growing scholarship on the importance of Lovecraft in twentieth-century literature and film, historians of American culture have almost universally ignored him. Paul Buhle, writing in 1976 and known primarily for his work as the premier historian of the American left, wrote an essay for the *Minnesota Review* that offers one of the only exceptions. Buhle

successfully placed Lovecraft in relation to an American regime of historical discourse that sought to create and sustain myths of progress. In reaction to this nationalistic romanticism gone limpid, Buhle wrote that Lovecraft gave a "weird and poetic interpretation" to the profound dislocations of the twentieth century. Buhle's essay on Lovecraft remains path breaking, especially with his insight that Lovecraft's final years marked a rapprochement with the themes of the revolutionary artistic movements of his times.[7]

Why have historians otherwise ignored him? Sometimes it's not that shocking when the discipline gives a figure the cold historiographical shoulder. The topic simply does not warrant attention in itself or in relation to other historical phenomena. Ignoring Lovecraft, however, constitutes a failure to understand a key part of the cultural history of the last century. The refusal to historicize Lovecraft has placed American historians at particular disadvantage in understanding what Lynn Dumenil has described as "the modern temper" of the US at the end of World War I. This conforms to American history's general disregard for the alienated outsider as the freight train of the American future hurtles by its critics and naysayers. Moreover, it ignores Lovecraft's willingness to engage directly with the destructive and horrific possibilities of the twentieth century presaged by World War I and fails to see that his deep pessimism emerged from historical concerns blended with his sense of "cosmic dread."[8]

Placing Lovecraft in a larger company than Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and other popular pulp writers of the twenties and thirties offers a place to begin. He wrote American horror stories that, like so many of the oracular artists of his era, drew on the catastrophe that opened the twentieth century to force us to wonder if all teleological possibility had closed, if history might end. Lovecraft's tales, dating back to his 1917 "Dagon" and continuing to the period of the "great texts" after 1926 all pondered human extinction and rejected the hopeful teleology of previous centuries.

Lovecraft's dedicated interpreters have sometimes been guilty of marginalizing the author by relying on literary nationalism to do their work for them. They simply make the case for his significance as a great American writer instead of showing how his work both reflected and agitated against the prevailing modernist mood. This has been achieved by the relatively easy exercise of locating quotes from his massive and often florid correspondence in which he seems to separate himself decisively from the larger intellectual and artistic movements of his moment.[9]

S. T. Joshi makes the point most vehemently, asserting that, "Lovecraft was by no means in the modernist camp." Some of his evidence points strongly in a different direction from this conclusion. He notes that the dark Prince of Providence read *The Waste Land* on its first American printing in 1922 and asked his protégé Frank Belknap Long to try to get him the author's annotations. This interest came at a moment when, as Kevin Jackson has noted, *The Waste Land* was "For some years, hardly known outside of Bloomsbury and its colonies in Cambridge, Oxford and elsewhere…." Joshi

does admit that, while Lovecraft in the twenties disdained the free verse form of most modernist poets, he praised them as "philosophers and intellectuals." This counts as high praise coming from Lovecraft who eventually gave up his own efforts to assemble bad Georgian couplets in order to create one of his most compellingly strange works, the poem "The Fungi from Yuggoth." Although in rough sonnet form, the generally conservative critic S. T. Joshi admits that these poems represent disconnection and the fragments of dream with some elements of "stream of consciousness recollections."[10]

Opening a historical discussion of Lovecraft in relation to broader cultural movements will integrate horror fully into discussions of the artistic modern, a movement produced by and productive of historical horror. Some work has already been done in this direction, particularly by film scholars and in an article by Fredrick Glayshear that hints at the role of horror in T. S. Eliot. Jonathan Jones wrote an essay in 2004 that links the "rotting corpses" of Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou* to contemporary horror films.[11]

Lovecraft fully embraced modernism's effort to decimate the Victorian dreck of sentiment and hypocrisy that he and so many others saw as the parent of horrors in the twentieth century. The nineteenth century, he insisted, had been "a desert of illusions, pomposities & hypocrisies." He would not, however, remain satisfied to castigate the bourgeois values of the pre-war world and let his imagination of the horrible roam toward into the forbidding possibilities of the end of human civilization itself.[12]

The Great War claims a central place in this discussion. Literary scholars seem weary of evocations of the carnage of World War I as jumpstarting the modernist project. They often disdain, an understandable contempt given the source, the history textbook tendency to present surrealism, the productions of Pound, Joyce, and Eliot and the crazed grotesqueries of the Prague Poetists all as a "reaction" to Europe's plunge into the abyss.

Reaction against oversimplification has gone too far. One can barely hear the shells tearing through wire, mud, and bodies in Peter Gay's monumental study of modernism. Kristin Mahoney's excellent analysis of the uses of "decadence" in the post-Victorian world gives only limited attention to the effects of the war and that discussion focused heavily on Max Beerbohm. Kevin Jackson, whose very good popular work on modernism and 1922 must be respectfully mentioned for at least alluding to Lovecraft, takes an especially odd stance toward the war's influence. Jackson writes that, "Although it is never sensible to make light of the effect of the war on anything" the case for the war's influence over modernism [specifically with regard to Joyce and Eliot] "is often overstated." It is not sensible to ignore and yet the making of connections constitutes overstatement. There's a notion that too much can be said of the war that shaped a generation.[13]

The modernist revolt begins before August 1914, of course, but even so at its root it constituted a revolt against the sort of "sleepwalking" that has been described as the trigger for the catastrophe. Artists during and after the war

years joined their distaste for the nineteenth century with a nauseous revulsion at what it had produced. What was left behind, the wasteland of values, allowed for the rise of a "mechanical" or a "machine" civilization, a concept that Lovecraft frequently vented his spleen against in essays and correspondence. Thus, we have the phenomenon of what T. J. Jackson Lears called "the anti-modern modernist," an apt description for much that has been simply labeled modernism and certainly the variety that Lovecraft espoused.[14]

Lovecraft's relationship to these movements can best be understood by thinking about his work in relation to now dated notions of "high" and "low" culture and what it meant to write highly experimental tales in a derided genre found in pulp magazines, the epitome of disposable culture. David Reynolds, in writing about the legacy of the Great War, describes the variety of movements that came to be denominated as "modernism" by describing them as "revolts against artistic establishments." Certainly the Providence author who tried to write great literature for the pulps did that.[15]

However, Reynolds also argues, "struggling bohemians still had to earn a living and so, often, found themselves pandering to conventional tastes." This Lovecraft refused to do, neither dumbing down his fiction for a pulp audience nor attempting the kind of "social realist" novels that would win his protégé August Derleth some limited literary fame.[16]

David M. Earle suggests that, for Lovecraft's era, we must speak of a "pulp modernism." He doesn't suggest that all pulp writers moved beyond a formulaic style, admitting this constitutes an impossible claim since the mountains of pulps produced in the early twentieth century represent, in terms of sheer size, "a literary production unparalleled in history." However, he gives numerous examples of writers who used the pulps to experiment with the new styles, including Tennessee Williams who published his first short story in Lovecraft's venue, *Weird Tales*, in 1928.[17]

Lovecraft's work provides an apt example of Earle's idea of "pulp modernism" (though he gets little discussion in Earle) since some of his best work touches on the same problems pursued by Eliot in *The Waste Land* (1922), Paul Valéry's *Le Jeune Parque* (1917), and Vladmir Holan's (later in that terrible century, but heir to modernist obsessions) *A Night with Hamlet* (1962). In fact, Lovecraft's embrace of horror as a modern medium allowed him to work out themes that sometimes remained implicit and even obscure in the work of his contemporaries. He engaged with the horror of the moment in ways that even Lovecraft's most devoted followers have tended to ignore.

The relationship of an aesthetic of horror to the terror of the modern appears in Lovecraft's correspondence. Writing to Alfred Galpin, one of the many disciples that flocked to him via correspondence, he described the post-war era as "period of decadence" that had "rendered obsolete all the illusions of our youth." However, he saw in Eliot's work "a chaotick mess" and believed that "mythical thought and fable" could create "an artificial pattern amidst the meaningless desert of life." At this stage, Lovecraft did not perceive that Eliot himself worked in the realm of "mythical thought and fable."[18]

Some of Lovecraft's most interesting discussions of his relationship to the American modern appear in his letters to James F. Morton. Morton, far to the left of Lovecraft both politically and culturally, became perhaps his most interesting epistolary raconteur. Both served as the intellectual leadership of a circle of writers and booksellers known as the Kalem group during Lovecraft's time in New York City (1924–1926), a group that had a connection with Hart Crane through Crane's friend Samuel Loveman.[19]

Lovecraft used the phrase "highly modern literature" to denominate the modernist project. Eliot represented the best and worst of this "modern literature" for Lovecraft, asking the right questions and coming up with the wrong answers. Lovecraft described himself as living in "a rotten age" of "feeble comforts and thwarted energies" and often saw other writers of his age as themselves representative of these problems. He returned again and again to these themes in his discussions with Morton, most interestingly in a 1929 letter in which he noted that virtually every "modern" artist had assumed "an attitude of alarm, pain, disgust, retreat…." He included in this company modernist poets such as John Crowe Ransom and Eliot.[20]

He was sure they had failed, not in their wholly accurate descriptions of the era, but in their efforts to find a way out of its fresh hells. He believed Eliot had attempted a "mad escape from the waste land he so terribly depicted." Others had sought solace in various forms of the "neo-mysticism" that Lovecraft so heartily despised. None were willing to "draw the hard, cold, inevitable conclusions" about the cosmos, and its, indifference, that he had contemplated and attempted to theorize through the medium of his fictions.[21]

How then did Lovecraft himself try to face the age, look into its abyss, from which a chill air rushed, and become part of the effort to make sense of a post-1914 world? Let us rather quickly dispense with the assertion that Lovecraft saw in "highly modern literature" anything like "a dead end" or that his well-known antiquarian tastes isolated him from the main currents of thought. He was thoughtfully reading Nietzsche, the apostle of the revolt against bourgeois sentimentalities, during his most fruitful period of writing. We can also dispense with his criticisms of Eliot and *The Waste Land* as symptomatic of distaste for the modernist project. He believed that Eliot had tried to run from the wasteland but, as his letter to Morton makes clear, he'd certainly described well the horror he sought to escape. Moreover, as Gayford has pointed out, his obsessive sniping at Eliot that continued throughout his life suggests critical engagement rather than vehement rejection.[22]

Lovecraft's tendency to exude contempt toward the bohemian must also be placed in context of appreciation, appropriation, and critique. "Modernism" really is a word we give to a number of movements that, as David Reynolds has pointed out, represented "isms" that seemed to have little in common at the time. Participants almost always wanted to differentiate themselves from particular movements and their fellow modernists. We'd do well to remember that Gertrude Stein found James Joyce profane and unreadable. Eliot and

William Carlos Williams famously despised one another and their style has rather tenuous links.[23]

Lovecraft forged his sense of the American modern in relation to his deep and abiding obsession with World War I. It was his generation's war and one that he, to the surprise of all who knew him, attempted to take part in. In a humiliating set of experiences that shows similarities to the biography of T. S. Eliot, Lovecraft attempted to join a branch of military service soon after American entry into the war. He was rejected twice on the grounds, like Eliot, of being in poor physical condition.

Lovecraft's engagement with the issues related to the war began early, finding expression in a number of short essays for the amateur journalism movement in which he played an active role during the war years and after. He was an intellectually acute and emotionally adolescent twenty-four-year-old when the war in Europe began and thus his early understanding of the conflict navigated between his often absurd Anglophilia and obtuse notions of "racial stocks" that drew heavily on the scientific racism of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, historical epochs he claimed to renounce and despise.

The Great War existed in Lovecraft's mind alongside his lifelong obsession with race. One of the more embarrassing sets of comments for anyone who wants to see Lovecraft as a serious thinker came in April of 1915 in an essay published in his amateur journal *The Conservative*. Entitled "The Crime of the Century," it attempted to make the case that far worse than "such sad matters as the destruction of innocent lives and property" (innocent property?) has been "an offence…against Nature itself; the violation of race." In other words, the English and the Germans are of "Teutonic" racial stock, itself "the summit of evolution" and what a shame that they are killing each other off in such large numbers. Germany had allowed "jealousy" to embroil selfishly the great Aryan races in a wasting conflict.[24]

So absurd are these comments that we'd likely read them as Swiftian satire if we did not know better. Unfortunately, he meant every word. As morally objectionable and intellectually flabby as such ideas are, we do well to recall that Lovecraft's racism places him in line with many of the modernists engaged in the revolt against modernity. An important review essay concerned with T. S. Eliot and anti-Semitism by George Bornstein points out the enormous amount of anti-Semitic material produced by Eliot in his relatively slim corpus. One of his most egregious examples appears in the poem "Burbank with a Baedeker; Bernstein with a Cigar" in which "the jew" (Eliot did not capitalize the term until revisions later in the century) "stares from the protozoic slime" and, like "the rats," are "underneath the lot."[25]

The use of such imagery also found voice in Eliot's mentor and impresario Ezra Pound who, as is well known, engaged directly in the work of fascist propagandizing on Mussolini's behalf in print and on radio. They are echoed in the racist exuberance that appears both in Lovecraft's correspondence and his fiction, such as the immigrant communities that are "nameless and unclassified Asian dregs" in his 1925 "The Horror at Red Hook." In 1931, he complained

to Robert E. Howard about New York's "countless hordes of cringing Jews." Such examples could be multiplied *ad nauseum* in the full sense of the phrase.[26]

In 1918, as Lovecraft came to grips with the war's cost in human life and suffering, he wrote more meaningfully about the struggle and what it revealed about "the underlying savagery in the animal called man." In his essay "The League" he rejected all nineteenth-century notions of social progress and suggested that human beings, their existence a small moment in the cosmic scheme of things, had not advanced beyond the ethics of the Assyrians who turned their enemies into piles of whitening skulls in the ancient Near East. Although he ostensibly aimed at criticizing the alleged false optimism behind the League of Nations, the short piece really offers a meditation on "the period of indescribable devastation" the war represented.[27]

Lovecraft seems a bit drained of his racial romanticism in this essay, though we know that his personal racism and its effect on his work continued and even expanded after two years in New York and a failed marriage to his deeply intellectual Jewish friend Sonia H. Greene. Notably, he pondered the "utter devastation" of the period in between the writing of several stories that used the First World War as the context for several of his early works of fiction.[28]

The most pertinent early tales that examine the Great War are *Dagon* (1917), *Herbert West, Reanimator* (1921–1922) and *The Temple* (1925). I would add to this short list a very important 1923 prose-poem *Nyarlathotep*. Other early tales such as *Polaris* (1918) and *The Doom that Came to Sarnath* (1919) concern themselves with war as danger, possibility, and ultimately ruin. The fairy-tale quality of the latter two tales might encourage interpreters to de-historicize them by emphasizing their role as expressions of Lovecraft's dreams. Strangely, there has not been the same impulse to abstract surrealism from the experience of history even though its many manifestos proclaim the essential quality of the nightmare in the artistic impulse.[29]

The three tales that deal most directly with the Great War could, and have, been read as using the war as simply a backdrop. Both *Dagon* and *The Temple* make U-Boat warfare central to the narrative. In the former, a victim of a U-Boat attack manages to escape his German captors only to find himself on an island that's no island at all but the ancient seabed raised by some cataclysm. On this putative island he encounters a monolith, and finally a thing that comes to worship it. In the latter, a U-Boat commander discovers an underwater city of incalculable age, seducing and terrifying him all at once.

The Great War concerned Lovecraft more deeply than providing a setting, just as his more well-known Arkham tales are about an atmosphere that lives and breathes terror rather than a simple expression of his antiquarianism. His personal view of the war changed as it began to look less like the dynastic struggles and imperial clashes of the past and more like the sort of war that only the "mechanical civilization" he so heartily despised might produce. Choosing to evoke the "hideous" nature of the trenches and the technological horror of U-Boat warfare reveals a more mature Lovecraft, considering the

war with the same eye toward absurdity with which Andre Breton, Max Ernst and the surreal tradition came to regard it.

Dagon and *The Temple* offer a wide-ranging commentary on the meaning, indeed the fate, of not only the western bourgeois project but of human history. *Dagon*'s unhinged narrator dreads the things that "crawling and floundering on the sea floor" may someday rise "to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind." This is presented a terror for the narrator but a not unexpected, and not necessarily horrific outcome, to the reader. We are given little reason in the tale to care for "war-exhausted mankind" and its fate and it's suggested that such dread in the face of ultimate human extinction is both appropriate and simply realistic. Human history stands as an ongoing monument to its own end.[30]

The narrator of *The Temple*, who becomes difficult to regard as the archetypal "hun" critics have described him as, abandons his identity as "a Prussian and a man of sense" in order to enter the "primal shrine" on the sea bed, that "silent secret of unfathomed waters and uncounted years." Humanity greets the skeletal face of its illusion…the sea offering an image of the void that Lovecraft called "the infinite dark" of the cosmos. Like his later *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1931), *The Temple* raises the possibility of abandoning one's own humanity and joining the world of monstrosity.[31]

Herbert West-Reanimator offers a serialized work that complicates our understanding of Lovecraft's pose as a gentleman of letters given its schlocky style and his evident pleasure in it. Although the terrors of the tale are of the mad-science-meets-occult-terrors type, Lovecraft also evokes "the hideous things, not mentioned in print, which happened on the battlefields of the Great War." West goes to the front, signing up as a surgeon almost two years before America enters the war, for reasons more complex than his utilitarian need for "fresh corpses." In the trenches, West feels right at home and his assistant finally realizes that West is not, in fact, the archetypal mad scientist, the Victor Frankenstein driven to discover the forbidden. He's become a connoisseur of the gruesome with a "hellish and perverse addiction to the repellent" that made him "a Baudelaire of physical experiment."[32]

What Lovecraft often referred to as his "prose-poem" *Nyarlathotep* does not directly mention the Great War but can be read as a pastiche of the imagery of the war, a hyper-activity of language about war's aftermath seeking its limits. There's almost no narrative concern in the work though we are told that the flood of images that fill the piece came in "a season of political and social upheaval" to which was added a "brooding apprehension" that seemed global in its reach as "out of the abysses between the stars" came "chill currents that made men shiver in dark and lonely places."[33]

The pharaonic figure of Nyarlathotep appears in the midst of this desert of horror. He's an antichrist in a universe with no Christ. He has occult powers but also knowledge "of electricity and psychology," a mixture of Freud, Tesla, Aleister Crowley, and carnival barker that human beings fearfully urge one another to go and see even as they "shudder" at his mention. In one of the

great statements about the horror of the early twentieth century, Lovecraft writes that, "Never before had the screams of nightmare been such a public problem."[34]

Narrative creeps in again when Nyarlathotep comes to the city of the nameless narrator and this "terrible city of unnumbered crimes" becomes the companion of Eliot's "Unreal City." Indeed, just as in that urban hellscape "Where a crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many," so in Lovecraft's horror the crowd moves "down the dizzy stairs into the damp, hot, deserted midnight streets." Unlike Eliot, Lovecraft inserts the narrator's terror into the crowd that has lost its volition, it's meaning, and they scream together "for solace."

Nyarlathotep ends with images peculiar to Lovecraft's vision of cosmic indifferentism. It's a sharp contrast to Eliot's own famous, at the time infamous, ending of *The Waste Land*. In Lovecraft we find no literal invocation of peace and calm. Instead, his prose-poem ends with a terrible sound, a look into the abyss that the opening paragraph only hints at, "a graveyard of the universe" from which comes, "the muffled, maddening beating of drums and the thin monotonous whine of blasphemous flute from inconceivable chambers beyond Time."[35]

Here Lovecraft offers no transcendence from history. The horrific monotony of the dwellers of his brooding world have, unlike Eliot's, no safety to seek beyond "The Dead mountain mouth that cannot speak only spit." Dread Nyarlathotep is the soul of the universe. Chaos, not "Shantih Shantih Shantih" awaits.

He does not leave behind his concern with the terror of history in his post-1926 period, the time in which he wrote what Michael Houellebecq has called "the great texts." World War I becomes less predominant, though the theme of humanity heaving for its last breath that the war represented for him does not leave his thoughts. Lovecraft shifted to concerns equally cosmic as before while working to place them in a regionalist setting, leading Edmund Wilson to infamously mock him in a 1945 review essay in the *New Yorker* for creating tales of "outlandish gods…breaking through in the contemporary world, usually somewhere in Massachusetts."[36]

Wilson chose the cleverly obtuse over the precise. The great tales of Lovecraft between 1926 and his death in 1937 may have been largely located in his fictional Arkham, Innsmouth, Dunwich, and Kingsport but they also range wildly across the globe (*The Call of Cthulhu*) and through all global and cosmic time (*The Shadow Out of Time*, *The Whisperer in Darkness*, *At The Mountains of Madness*). Frequently, he seeks to thoroughly historicize his horror, grounding in in specific places, histories and even architectures. He does this to disrupt the seemingly stable history such places and historical moments otherwise might represent.

We find him then often fighting against his own antiquarianism in his fiction, an important experiment given that he believed that, amid the swirling chaos of the universe, the anchors of tradition and history provided refuge. He

refused however even to fully allow himself what he regarded as "illusions." Lovecraft, in a very important letter to Morton in 1929, essentially admits that his love of the eighteenth century, his attitudes about race, his antiquarian hobby-horse, much of what we could simply call his "pose" constituted an illusory attachment to values he knew had no ultimate value in an indifferent cosmos. "The eighteenth century is my illusion as all mankind is yours," he wrote his radical friend "but I don't believe in mine any more than I do in yours." Two novellas he wrote in 1926–1927, but did not publish, illustrate the point he made: *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*.[37]

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward opens as a kind of love letter to Providence, specifically its "antiquity" through which the title character wanders through streets "whose old brick mansions and smaller wooden houses with heavy-columned Doric porches dreamed solid and exclusive amidst their generous yards and gardens." It's fairly easy to read Ward as one of Lovecraft's autobiographical avatars, both in his fascination with the past and his love of old Providence. Lovecraft himself, deciding he did not care for the novel, called it "a creaking bit of self-conscious antiquarianism" in a March 1934 letter to his young friend R. H. Barlow.[38]

What Lovecraft wrote, however, really amounts to a critique of antiquarianism and a confrontation with the inherent instability of history. The introduction of the look and feel of Providence, through the eyes of a character who "was an antiquarian from infancy," serves at first as a devotional written by an acolyte of the colonial past. But, the case of Ward is a problematic one since his very love of the antique, embodied in his genealogical researches, tolls his, and perhaps the world's, doom. He becomes obsessed with the portrait of an ancestor who embodies, very literally in the story, history as horror and the possibility that history, in any meaningful sense for human beings, will end. Like one of his own mad cultists, Lovecraft experimented with turning conceptions of progress into screaming nightmares, coruscating his own personal attachment to the eighteenth-century past and imagining the doom of human experience rather than the nineteenth century's Hegelian belief in history as a rational parade of meaningful evolution.[39]

Dream Quest appears to take us out of history entirely, indeed represent a desire to escape the possibilities of history. Randolph Carter, a figure whose adventurers we follow in four Lovecraft tales, has learned the path through the dreamlands. He has befriended ghouls and battled beside interstellar cats. It reads in every way as a fairy tale except that Carter, rather than striving for the initiatory experience of the hero on a quest, at first appears to seek the pleasure of dreamy escape, perhaps even uterine comfort. Carter represents the archetypal sleepwalker, his profound lack of historical consciousness ironically marking him as very much a product of the general derangement of the historical sense after the catastrophe of World War I.

There's a different way to understand Carter's search for, essentially, a city, the citadel of the Great Old Ones. We can place this search in context of how

the city, indeed the very notion of urbanity, both horrified and deliciously attracted the anti-bourgeois artistic impulse of the era. Indeed, the disillusion of the city that waited at the end of the era's "escape from the village" emerges in *Dream Quest*. When Carter's journey of peril lands him beyond the cold wastes, it's no shimmering city that awaits him but rather the horror of Nyarlathotep, "the crawling chaos and horror of infinite shapes" that operated for Lovecraft as his embodiment of modernity's terrors, the waster of the waste lands. It is this great terror that lies to Carter, tells him that his "marvelous city" is really only his boyhood. Nyarlathotep urges Carter to descend into "sentient darkness." Rather than finding the meaning of his quest, the escape from history, Carter is chased voraciously by this horrible mass of shifting need and desire in what's clearly a trick to throw Carter into "chaos' core."[40]

Lovecraft bobbles the ending of his novella, seeking resolution for Randolph Carter while also wary of forgetting the dark and infinite void of the cosmos. Readers themselves are frequently to blame for giving it a happy ending the text itself doesn't assure us we're receiving. Carter does "come again to that fair New England home that wrought him" but we also learn that Nyarlathotep broods in the eternal silences of the void, indeed the trickster laughs at Carter and his world, an ultimate condemnation of human hopes for the city, the marvelous city that writers of this era either damned in Eliot's style or praised as an escape from the void, the empty landscapes of provincialism and rural decay. History cannot be escaped in dream quests or dreamy idylls of lost innocence.[41]

Both of these novellas make use of horror to measure the toxicity of the modern, indeed modernist, dilemma. Perhaps more interesting, in part because they work against the claims that Lovecraft sometimes makes in his correspondence that the past could provide an anchor in a torrent of meaninglessness, both find a wilderness of terror in the past and promise humanity more horror to come in the future. Lovecraft's own sense of the "illusions" of his own antiquarian interest in history are on full display. Like one of his unlucky narrators, he sees behind the façade of human hopes and imagines the rise of Cthulhu, the dissolution of the human and a confirmation of the his belief in humanity's "impermanence and insignificance" and "cosmic futility."[42]

This last point suggests why the tentacled horror Cthulhu from Lovecraft's 1926 *The Call of Cthulhu* has captured the imagination of this very contemporary moment in a decisive and a decisively strange way. He embodies the end of history, and here let me recall that a popular book in the now very naïve-seeming 1990s optimistically proclaimed the end of history as a desired consummation. But, in Lovecraft's telling, a story pieced together in fragments so jagged that the story suggests more (perhaps) the postmodern disdain of narrative rather than modernism's interest in simply reimagining the chronology of narrative, Cthulhu emerges as the monster on the horizon that's not ahead of us but rather bearing down upon us. He will rise when the stars

are right and bring about the end of human time. Cthulhu terrorizes us as the dead but dreaming undeniable fact of our existence, promising to show us, in Eugene Thacker's phrase, an "indifferent world-without-us."[43]

Oh yes, tentacles are fun and fun to draw and wear…not a few tattooist and other artists have explained this to me as part of the reason they can't stop drawing Lovecraft's ultimate horror. But this begs the question…why? What could possibly be fun about such a horror and is it even fun we're talking about or a knowing irony, a comment on what the tale really tells us, of a narrator who, after piecing together the horror of Cthulhu, tells us that "even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must be poison to me."[44]

Cthulhu tells the secret that Lovecraft always told and the secret was death…a secret strangely kept by so many horror tales that supposedly have death at their core. The death of the individual narrator, so typical of many of his tales, points to the larger reality of human insignificance. History, even the allegedly "exceptional" history of the American experience, ceases to have meaning in the Lovecraftian universe in which even human thought becomes fragmentary and meaningless in the face of the random chaos of the cosmic. Bourgeois civilization may have been damned among other modernists. Lovecraft wrote with the intuition that all forms of human civilization must be seen in the light of infinite spaces and cosmic dread.

The Call of Cthulhu closes with a pronouncement of doom: "Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men." Lovecraft died in 1937 so he did not live to know himself an oracle. The mud, the blood, the trenches, the mustard gas, shells and shrapnel and the Maxim gun only foreshadowed the tentacles of horror that embraced the century to come.

Notes

[1] On the role of horror films in historical representation see Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011). Lucie Armitt, *Theorizing the Fantastic* (London: Arnold Press, 1996), 1.
[2] Norman R. Gayford, "The Artist as Antaeus: Lovecraft and Modernism," in *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H.P. Lovecraft*, eds. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011). See especially 286, 295.
[3] There's an enormous literature on this question. I have used Kermode, "The Discrimination of Modernism" in *Continuities* and, as a something of a critique and restatement, Hayden White, "Historical Fictions: Kermode's Idea of History," *Critical Inquiry* April (2012): 43–59.
[4] Proliferating examples can be found in Don G. Smith, *H.P. Lovecraft and Popular Culture: The Works and Their Adaptations in Film, Television, Comics, Music and Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Books, 2006).

[5] An overview of this work appears in a series of addresses by these scholars delivered at a 1992 gathering and published by the John Hay Library's *Books at Brown* series. See 1991–1992, Volume XXXVIII–XXXIX (Providence, "Friends of the Library of Brown University"). Joshi's massive two volume biography *I Am Providence* appeared from Hippocampus Press in 2013 but represents only the largest outcropping of a lifetime of prodigious scholarship on Lovecraft.
[6] Michael Dirda, "Cthulhu for President," *The Times Literary Supplement* 28 January 2015; accessed 2-27-15.
[7] I find much to disagree with in Buhle's essay, especially his understanding of Lovecraft as a "direct descendent" of the "local colour" movement in New England and his unwillingness to see the complexity in the relationship of Lovecraft's work to Eliot's. However, every Lovecraft scholar, of whatever discipline, could learn much from his nuanced approach to Lovecraft's racism and his ability to place his ideas about history in relation to the Old Left, the counterculture, and the complex relation of Lovecraft's dreamlands to notions of being and consciousness. See Paul Buhle "Dystopia as Utopia: Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Unknown Content of American Horror Literature," reprinted in S. T. Joshi, *H.P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), 196–210.
[8] Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 149–59. A graduate student discovered a similar case recently in her work on women in the Black Panther Party. She made a convincing case that mainstream Freedom Struggle historiography has sidelined the Panthers because they do not fit the template of a triumphant, non-violent civil rights movement that bourgeois liberalism finds comforting. See Leah Worthington, *Black Panther Women: Armed with Politics and Guns in the Winston Salem, Philadelphia and Baltimore Branches* (Master's Thesis, College of Charleston, 2016).
[9] Buhle himself believed, incorrectly I will show, that Lovecraft viewed the so-called modernism of Eliot as a "dead end." See "Dystopia as Utopia," 202;. See also S. T. Joshi, *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft Vol. I* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2013), 477.
[10] Joshi must be congratulated for giving nuance to his strongly stated view by showing us Lovecraft's sometimes held confused opinions about both Eliot and Joyce…it seems Lovecraft didn't really know what to do with the Eliot or modernism more generally and, as Joshi notes, Lovecraft was "by no means alone in being disturbed, even traumatized, by *The Waste Land*….," Joshi, *I Am Providence*, 480. See ibid., 741 for his comments on *Fungi from Yuggoth*. Kevin Jackson, *Constellation of Genius 1922: Modernism Year One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 12.
[11] Frederick Glayshear, "T. S. Eliot and The Horror! The Horror!," in *Modern Age* Fall (1984): 339–48; See Jones, "The Joy of Gore" published in print in the February 6 edition of *The Guardian*; accessed online at http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/feb/07/art1 on January 29, 2016; interestingly popular culture has discovered the possibilities of terror in the modernist tone. The 2014 film *It Follows* uses a significant chunk of "The Love Song J. Alfred Prufrock" as a kind of soundtrack for one of its most frightening sequences.
[12] Morton, 195.
[13] Gay had precisely thirteen out of 513 pages that allude to the war and only three of these discuss a direct relation to modernism. See Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of*

Heresy (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); see Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5, 32–3, 82–4; Jackson, *Constellation of Genius*, 6.
[14] Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014); T. J. Jackson Lears*, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 297.
[15] David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 159.
[16] Ibid.; see Lovecraft letters to Derleth insisting that he preferred to let his own work ripen and his persistent dissatisfaction with some of the best work of his last ten years because of his unwillingness to try "suiting this or that commercial standard." *Essential Solitude: The Letters of H.P. Lovecraft and August Derleth: 193–1937*, eds. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2013), 459.
[17] See David E. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, paperback and the Prejudice of Form* (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2009), 102–5.
[18] *H.P. Lovecraft: Letters to Alfred Galpin*, eds. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2003), 123.
[19] A collection of memories of the Kalem activities and interests appears in *Lovecraft's New York Circle, The Kalem Club, 1924–1927*, eds. Mara Kirk Hart and S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2006).
[20] *H.P. Lovecraft: Letters to James P. Morton*, ed. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), 23, 197.
[21] Ibid. 198.
[22] We also find Lovecraft enjoying the work of Eugene O'Neill, including works that seemingly would have brought out the worst of his racist paranoia like *All God's Chillun* which he saw in New York in 1924. See Gayford, "The Artist as Antaeus," 287–8.
[23] Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, 158.
[24] "The Crime of the Century," in *Collected Essays: H.P. Lovecraft Vol. 5: Philosophy, Autobiography and Miscellany*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2006), 13, 14.
[25] George Bornstein, "T. S. Eliot and the Real World," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 35.3 (1997).
[26] See Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook," in H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 123; *A Means to Freedom: The Letters of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, 1930–1931*, eds. by S. T. Joshi, David E. Schultz, and Rusty Burke (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), 133.
[27] First appearing in his amateur journal in July of 1919, the full text has been reprinted in *Collected Essays*, 35–6.
[28] The marriage of the anti-Semite to a Jewish woman has received full attention in my Lovecraft biography *In the Mountains of Madness: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of H. P. Lovecraft* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2016). I would note here that the Jewish woman as an object of sexual gratification and/or fascination (it's hard to tell if it's either in Lovecraft's case) has an oft-ignored role in anti-Semitic thought. Sartre took note of it in his *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 48–9. Heidegger, who we now know from his so-called "Black Notebooks" made hatred of Jews central to his philosophical views as well as a pragmatic move to maintain his

post in Nazi Germany, had several affairs with Jewish students, including Hannah Arendt. See Phillip Oltermann, "Heidegger's Black Notebooks reveal anti-Semitism at the Core of His Ideology," http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/13/martin-heidegger-black-notebooks-reveal-nazi-ideology-antisemitism; accessed March 12, 2014.

[29] All dates provided for the Lovecraft tales are the date of writing as publication dates are confusing in relation to his work. *Weird Tales* often republished his work several times after 1923 and some very important work never appeared outside of amateur journals in his own lifetime. This article makes use of the three-volume Penguin classic editions of Lovecraft's work edited by S. T. Joshi; on surrealism and the world of dreams and politics, compare Lovecraft's views with those of André Breton in *Manifesto of Surrealism*. See *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010 edition), 10–14.

[30] H. P Lovecraft "Dagon," in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 6.

[31] "The Temple," in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Penguin Books, 2004), 38.

[32] "Herbert West-Reanimator," in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 70–72.

[33] "Nyarlathotep" in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 31.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 33.

[36] Michael Houellebecq in *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*, trans. Dorna Khazeni (London: Gollanz Press, 2008), 41; "Tales of the Marvelous and Ridiculous," reprinted in Joshi, *Four Decades of Criticism*, 46–49. A corrective to this latter satirical view that connects, or at least suggests, a relationship of Lovecraft to the modernist project appears in James Kneale's "'Ghoulish Dialogues': H. P. Lovecraft's Weird Geographies," in *The Age of Lovecraft*, eds. Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 43–61.

[37] See *Letters to James F. Morton*, 195.

[38] *O Fortunate Floridian: H.P. Lovecraft's Letters to R.H. Barlow*, eds. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Tampa, Florida: University of Tampa Press, 2007), 120.

[39] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* in *The Thing of the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, ed.by S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 92, 132–3.

[40] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 244, 250.

[41] Ibid., 251.

[42] H. P. Lovecraft, "A Confession of Unfaith," in *H. P. Lovecraft: Against Religion*, ed by S. T. Joshi (New York: Sporting Gentleman Press), 5.

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Doll as a ***Memento Infanti***

Donna Mitchell
Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Introduction: The Doll-and-Child Motif

As an emissary between life and death, the doll's symbolic potential within a horror text is vast. With the capacity to either unnerve or comfort, it has the potential to both "stimulate our anxiety and help us to manage it."[1] The doll, "as much as the written paper or monograph is a text which can be read, deconstructed, critiqued and reconstructed…. To read [it] fully you must pick it up, turn it round, hold it, weigh it."[2] This article will figuratively do as such by exploring the feminist implications of its location within the horror narrative. As a genre, horror often reveals the disquieting facets of human culture, and is particularly fond of exploring sexual maturation processes and socialization in children and teens. The doll-and-child motif of this study relates categorically to that of the young girl and her doll as I will examine how their connection signifies feminist concerns regarding patriarchal influence on the construction of women's identity. A lifeless facsimile of a living being, the doll's beauty and status as an object mirrors both the young girl's experience of societal pressure to be beautiful and the objectification that comes with her social role. This bond will be examined using a blend of feminist and psychoanalytic theory. Patriarchal influence on the construction of female identity, specifically the practice whereby the young girl is taught to love her doll, will be analyzed through Simone de Beauvoir's interpretation of Freud's "penis envy" theory. Additionally, male creation and control of the female figure, even after her death, will be discussed through Hélène Cixous's concept of "god the mother," the Freudian "family romance," and the notion of the Baudrillardian simulacrum. The combination of these theories will illustrate how, culturally speaking, the female figure is viewed as a doll to be played with and cared for (and potentially injured or destroyed) by men. Women's lack of autonomy, as represented by the figure of the doll in the following texts, can

therefore be read as a horrifying exposé of patriarchy's objectification and oppression of women. I will apply these concepts to a seminal novel of the horror genre that celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), and demonstrate its portrayal of the creation, control, and fragmentation of female identity. My focus on the doll-like figure of Claudia as a *memento infanti* will also, at times, be linked to other horror texts to show how this motif transcends its literary location to appear in other mediums.

Critic Susan Yi Sencindiver notes the doll's evolution from its multifaceted history as "a man-made replica" that was once defined by religious and cultural significance to its embodiment of "an exclusive identity as toy [which was] closely tied with and premised on the historical construction of childhood."[3] As a plaything that resembles the child through its physicality and dress, the young girl's doll typically becomes a source of comfort to its developing playmate. Its familiarity as an "object through which the child negotiates an imminent external reality"[4] ensures that the girl's bond with the doll can steadily develop as they encounter new and unfamiliar experiences. Such intimacy has, over time, led authors such as Susan Hill and Joyce Carol Oates to create stories that suggest that the doll and child possess not only a shared identity but also a common soul. This illustrates both its association with childhood and its status as a source of comfort to the young girl. It can however, quickly transform into a horrifying sign of unease, anger, or haunting once removed from its mergence with her as, to quote Stephen King, "[d]olls with no little girls around to mind them [are] sort of creepy under any conditions."[5] This suggests that adults regard this figure from a different perspective to children. The extreme difference between such interpretations of the doll illustrates its reliance on a young playmate for the establishment of its identity as, "[w]ithout the child's compassion and imagination…the doll is a corpse."[6] This peculiarity becomes even more relevant and ominous in horror texts due to their position within a genre that allows for both the animation of lifeless objects and the nefariousness of innocent children. Dolls, according to Ellen Datlow, "more than any other object, demonstrate just how thin the line between love and fear, comfort and horror, can be," so much so, that they have become "a subgenre of horror fiction and film."[7] Canonical texts of this subdivision include the movies, *The Devil-Doll* (1936), the *Child's Play* franchise (1988-Present), *Dead Silence* (2007), *The Conjuring* (2013), novels such as Rex Sparger's *The Doll* (1983), Ruby Jean Jensen's *Annabelle* (1987), Dean Koontz's *Ticktock* (1996), and Susan Hill's *Dolly* (2012). The doll(s) that come to life in each of these narratives share the following definitive traits: each one is evil, creepy, and intent on exacting revenge for a long-forgotten or repressed act. Their awakening usually functions as the catalyst for the tale and their murderous intent tends to be the driving force behind the plot. Unlike other horror texts where order is somewhat restored at the end, usually through the incarceration or death of its villain, these tales often lack such closure. The evil doll seems to be immune to the laws of the human world and as a result,

always poses the threat of return even if they have disappeared by the end of the story. Typically, the discussion of dolls in horror texts focuses on the supernatural animation or possession of a toy. This article however, will use the doll-and-child motif to analyze the transformation of a dead girl into a doll-like creature that acts as a memento of the life it once embodied.

The Rician Doll-Child

Claudia's status as the vampire child of *Interview with the Vampire* makes her the first of many Rician female characters in *The Vampire Chronicles*. Although she initially epitomizes childhood youth and innocence as a six-year-old orphan who becomes Louis's first victim, the true complexity of her character is only revealed when she develops an adult psyche that remains forever trapped within the body of a child. Critic Margarita Georgieva states that the nature of the child in gothic and horror texts is defined by its "absence, loss, uncertainty and mystery."[8] These features are evident in Claudia quite possibly because her character was inspired by Rice's five-year-old daughter, Michele, who died of leukemia the year before she wrote the novel. Rice reincarnates Michele through Claudia, who enters the text as Louis's victim and is later given immortality by Lestat in a desperate attempt to create a family of his own. Claudia is immediately reduced to the status of a doll or an automaton by them, as demonstrated by Louis's account of his first impression of her, in which he sees a "jointless doll...[with] satin hair."[9] Her transition into their vampire family is secured firstly by Louis's annihilation of her human family, which he achieves by feeding from her as the "drinking of the child's blood stands for the complete consumption of a family [because] it obliterates the memory and history of its members,"[10] and secondly, by Lestat's maternal act of feeding her his blood, which can be read as a subverted version of breastfeeding. Claudia's loss of innocence during this process can be interpreted through the contradictory traits that emphasize the disconnection between her feral behavior and childlike appearance, which Louis recognizes in the first seconds after her transformation when she still "held [Lestat's] wrist to her mouth, a growl coming out of her...[but] then she looked at him with the most innocent astonishment."[11] The contrasting descriptions of her child-like mouth and porcelain, doll-like skin with vampire eyes portray the complex disorder of her new composition, and visibly defines her revised identity by separating her mortal self from her immortal self in Louis's clarification that "[s]he was not a child any longer, she was a *vampire* child."[12]

As a newborn vampire, Claudia is mysteriously quiet; she embodies the ominous silence that is an inherent trait of all Rician female characters and a definitive part of her new identity as a vampire child that becomes obsessed with her doll collection. Louis highlights how her ritualistic interplay with dolls mirrors her thirst for blood in his revelation that she was "mute and beautiful…she played with dolls, dressing, undressing them by the hour. Mute and beautiful she killed."[13] Her dependency on them while getting accustomed

to her new life is a typical practice in young girls who often view their "dolls…[as] guides in entering into a universe where things turn away from us…[as they can] speak to us of death and absence."[14] Additionally, her obsession with them mirrors her vampire fathers' obsession with her; they encourage her shared identity with the dolls by dressing her in matching clothes, praising her perfect beauty, and simply "play[ing] with her as if she were a magnificent doll."[15] They ignore obvious signs of her psychological development such as her interest in the works of Aristotle and Boethius as well as her ability to play Mozart by ear. Instead they use her silence to justify their infantilization of her by declaring her "a mystery…it was not possible to know what she knew or did not know"[16] anymore. The merging of Claudia's identity with that of her dolls in this passage raises feminist concerns with such shared identities in horror texts and is best understood through de Beauvoir's interpretation of how Freud's penis envy relates to the creation of female identity. De Beauvoir asserts that "to compensate...and serve [the young girl] as alter ego, she is given a foreign object: a doll.... [That] will serve the girl as substitute for...the penis."[17] The confusion with this act is that "the doll represents the whole body" while simultaneously being "a passive object," which will inevitably lead the young girl to "identify her whole person and to regard this as an inert given object."[18] She argues that this passivity is the essential characteristic of the "feminine" woman, one that "develops in her from her earliest years,"[19] thus perpetuating the ideology of female identity. Through the doll, she notes that the young girl gains her idyllic representation of femininity and so wishes to be pretty, passive and admired just like her doll. But in order to do so "she must [first] make herself an object," and renounce her autonomy to become "a live doll [that] is refused liberty."[20] Lestat and Louis' encouragement of Claudia's doll play therefore suggests a patriarchal attempt to maintain control of female identity by molding it according to their specifications.

Claudia's grief for her mortal life is reflected in her hunting pattern as she associates the memory of her mother with her lost mortality. Her exclusive pursuit of mothers and daughters also illustrates her fixation and jealousy of the familial bond between women who represent an intimate experience that death has denied her. In other words, she searches for external projections of herself in her victims and destroys them in a similar manner to her compulsive destruction of the toy doll-doubles, which will be discussed shortly. Rice admits that the numerous doll analogies used in relation to Claudia are quite intentional because they emphasize her encompassment of a paradoxical blend of "innocence and beauty with a sinister quality."[21] I would argue that these comparisons become more frequent and more exaggerated as the story progresses and that Rice employs this technique to further dehumanize Claudia when she loses any remaining traces of her humanity as she becomes a skilled predator. The conflict between her inner psyche and outer physicality becomes even more prevalent in "her doll-like face [which] seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes."[22] Louis recounts her ability to become "an eerie and

powerful seductress [who would] sit on my lap...whispering...softly that I could never be as grown up as she until I knew that killing was the more serious thing."[23] His preoccupation with her eyes during these encounters raises the notion of the doll's gaze and how it signifies its uncanny state of lifelessness as, within gothic and horror, the doll's gaze can encompass an additional dimension of danger as it is often "perceived as life-endangering" and as a threat that can potentially "render the human inanimate."[24] The interpretation of the doll in this instance is quite literal as Claudia possesses the ability and ruthlessness to commit such an act. While he is aware of the threat she poses to humans, Louis disregards Claudia's power over him by seeing her in terms of an idol or a possession that he regards as his "doll.... That's what she was. A magic doll."[25] He encourages her continued shared identity with her dolls by incessantly ordering new additions for her collection that he has designed to be little "replica[s] of [her that wear] a duplicate of [her] newest dress."[26] This custom illustrates his need to still envision her as an innocent, doll-like little girl despite his knowledge of her maturing mental state and vampire nature.

As Claudia grows weary of her doll-like status, she seeks freedom. From a psychoanalytic perspective, her desire for autonomy exemplifies Freud's notion of "the neurotic's family romance," which is a fantasy system that occurs during the "liberation of an individual, as [they] grow up, from the authority of [their] parents."[27] It is a natural stage of childhood development that is essential for the child's self-awareness and social skills but inevitably, it creates tension within the family unit. The process begins at a young age when the child sees their parents as the "only authority and the source of all belief,"[28] which they desperately wish to emulate. As their intellect develops, the child compares their own parents to others, thus destroying their former belief of the parents' exclusivity and causing the child to become critical of them. The Freudian family romance occurs twice during Claudia's development; on the first occasion, she casts Louis as her maternal figure and focuses her energy on eliminating Lestat as he is the patriarchal head of their family unit. On the second occasion, she casts Madeline the doll-maker as her new mother and wishes to leave Louis to start over with her newly appointed parent and protector. But despite her efforts to gain freedom and survive without Lestat and Louis' protection, her infantile physicality ensures her continued dependency on them. She only rebels when she becomes aware that the details surrounding her human death remain undisclosed to her. Like a doll, she has been led to believe that her existence began at the moment she became a manmade creation. Her determination to uncover the truth leads Lestat to perceive her silence as a threat to his position as patriarchal figurehead of their family and so he promises to "break [her] into a thousand pieces"[29] if she continues to defy his authority. His choice of language in this warning is particularly significant, not only because it reveals his willingness to destroy her in order to protect himself if necessary, but also because it reinstates his unremitting perception of her as a doll.

Doll Makers

Soon after they escape Lestat and relocate to Europe, Claudia and Louis begin to seek new companions. Claudia wishes for a substitute mother and finds a suitable match in Madeline, with whom she becomes fascinated when she discovers her ability to create a "lady doll"[30] according to her specific design. Madeline's doll shop encompasses the notion of the doll as a *memento infanti* in the most literal sense as it is filled with numerous versions of the same baby doll that bears a striking resemblance to her dead daughter, and coincidently, to Claudia too. She creates each one in the same image as the child she has lost until Claudia requests a lady doll to signify her true identity as a woman trapped within the tiny body of a child. This lady doll can be read as a double of Claudia as it is both an identical representation of her and is representative of her womanhood. Its status as her double becomes more significant during its dramatic destruction when Claudia crushes its head, "popping it so it bobbed and broke in a heap of glass that [falls] from her open, bloody hand."[31] In doing so, she not only destroys an image that has been created in her image but also foreshadows her own gruesome decapitation that happens soon afterwards. The mirroring of their fates once again raises the notion of the doll's function in the child's life as a double that they may use as a means of understanding events in their life. The link between them means that "[t]he child's doll—an object that is itself the scale of a child—becomes an object full of equivocal consolation. The violence, as much as the care that the child lavishes on the dolls, is part of the story."[32] While Claudia is obviously unaware of the terrible fate that lies ahead, I assert that her annihilation of the doll illustrates her mounting frustration with her childlike form as well as an awareness of her fragility and subsequent need for a protector in order to survive. Once Madeline fulfils this role she proves her devotion to Claudia by burning the doll shop in order to erase all evidence of the dolls that remind her of her lost child.

While Madeline's dolls were created to honor the memory of her daughter, the real-life case of Russian historian Antoly Moskvin's exhumation and mummification of young female corpses resembles certain elements of Lestat's creation of Claudia and the unification of corpse and doll. Moskvin claims that his interest in corpses and the occult began at twelve-years-old when he was forced to kiss a young girl's corpse during her funeral procession. He alleges that the encounter happened when "[a]n adult pushed my face down to the waxy forehead of the girl in an embroidered cap, and there was nothing I could do but kiss her as ordered."[33] Although specific details on the case differ, police report finding up to twenty-nine life-size dolls made from mummified female corpses in his apartment that were "carefully set up in various poses…some clothed in doll-like dresses, while others feature a recording device embedded in the chest that plays children's songs when touched."[34] Other objects in his possession included instruction manuals for doll-making

as well as photographs and nameplates from the girls' gravesites. Moskvin's ownership of these items indicates his desire for a total control of their identities that manipulates their history and dehumanizes them by reducing them to the status of a doll that resembles their previous selves and in doing so, becomes a *memento infanti*. His manufacture of a female figure that has been created according to his specific design can be interpreted through a feminist lens with regard to the creation of dolls in such horror contexts. These creations are exaggerated versions of the dolls in de Beauvoir's aforementioned theory as they are girls who lost their identity and have been made into manmade objects according to the specifications of the doll maker. From this perspective, the doll in these horror texts signifies fears regarding female autonomy and patriarchal control of the female body. Such feminist concerns can be further understood through Hélène Cixous's claim in "Sorties" that man's old dream is to be "god the mother" to a masculine creation of woman who is "[b]eautiful, but passive; hence desirable…[as] it is men who like to play dolls."[35] In other words, these dolls exemplify the patriarchal desire to control female identity, even in death. Lestat, who admits on various occasions that he considers himself akin to God, lists his desire for a daughter amongst his various motives for creating in Claudia a vampire that would always "remain…childlike…so they can take care of her and, by doing so, give meaning to their own lives."[36] Similarly, Moskvin reportedly had no sexual interest in his doll creations; rather, it is believed that he regarded them as his daughters.

In both cases, the revision of the living girl's identity has been replaced with a doll figure that can be read as a memory or imitation of a child that no longer exists. This creates an ambiguity around their identity, which also raises the notion of the Baudrillardian simulacrum in relation to the interchangeable relationship between the sign and the real. Specifically, the third stage of Baudrillard's theory, which "marks the *absence* of basic reality," is applicable to both Claudia and Moskvin's dolls as it relates to the sign's ability to "play at being an appearance"[37] of the real when in fact it has become an imitation copy with no remaining original. In other words, the sign now represents a hyper-reality that is the binary opposite to any meaningful version of reality. While the child, as living human being in constant flux could truly never become a doll, it is the idealization of this union—the entombment of the young girl in a static and pleasing form—that is the horror of it all. Girl-dolls lay this process bare in a way that few other things could because they encompass the beauty and silence that is celebrated in the societal perception of female beauty and identity. When considered from this perspective they represent a fundamental feminist concern with regard to patriarchal oppression and its attempt to control female identity.

The creation of dolls as a *memento infanti* also governs the folkloric history of Mexico's *Isla de las Muñecas* or Island of the Dolls. The idea for the island was conceived by reclusive artist Julian Santana Barrera (listed as caretaker Don Julian on the official website) to honor a young girl's memory, thus

illustrating the doll's relevance in relation to grief and the correlation between death and memory. Located south of Mexico City and surrounded by highly populated areas, the island itself is free from living inhabitants. Instead, it functions as a tourist destination that is filled with hundreds of dolls with "severed limbs, decapitated heads, and blank eyes [that] adorn [its] trees."[38] According to the site's official website, local legend claims that the drowning of a young girl on the island was marked by the caretaker's placement of a doll in a nearby tree as a means of respect and "support [to] the spirit of the girl."[39] Despite his efforts, it is believed that Julian was haunted by the girl and in an attempt to appease her spirit, spent the next fifty years collecting more dolls to hang from the island's trees. Some visitors allege seeing the mutilated dolls "move their heads and arms and even open their eyes" while others claim to have heard them "whisper to each other" and attempt to "lure them to come down to the island."[40] Over time it became tradition for tourists to bring more dolls to decorate the foliage. This practice resulted in an ominous presence formed by the countless "soulless eyes [that] follow visitors,"[41] thus creating a piece of performance architecture that can be read as a horror text. In other words, the army of dolls that occupy *Isla de las Muñecas* exemplify the notion that "[d]olls then, far from being simply inert matter, appear to be imbued with an otherworldliness or *Unheimlichkeit*,"[42] which allows them to embody a supernatural or divine essence in the eyes of their observer. In this case however, the most significant element of the tourist experience as noted afterwards, is the omnipresence of the doll's eyes that raises the notion of the doll gaze and its potential to have an ominous effect on the human recipient, as discussed already in relation to Claudia. While the website's listing of Julian as caretaker rather than artist may suggest that the accuracy of this legend as well as the supernatural status of the island is debatable, it is a noteworthy text both in terms of the doll's ability to represent the dead child's memory and the various human reactions to this icon that range from comfort and sorrow to fear and disgust.

Doll Anagrams

In an interesting turn of events in Rice's novel, the doll becomes the doll-maker as Claudia attempts to gain control of her identity. Despite Lestat, Louis, and the reader of *Interview with the Vampire* being led to believe that Claudia is condemned to death in the *Thèâtre des Vampires,* the truth is revealed in a much later text of the chronicles, *The Vampire Armand.* The true events of her demise are discovered when Armand recounts his part in her attempt to attach herself to a fully-developed female form that could possibly give her the strength to create the vampire progeny that her original childlike body could not. Claudia's desire to replace her current form with a new model that she has chosen for herself can be best understood through Elsa Pokorny's theory on the female approach to doll-making:

> Through the ritualistic creation of dolls—a traditional symbol *par excellence*, a space is gained… to insert in the margins a discourse of the female body that transgresses the hegemonic values and the authority of the phallogocentric discourse…. [This practice] reverses and demythologizes the myths and taboos construed by men to manipulate women to observe the virtues of submission, silence and sexual innocence and to conceive her body as having a dual nature [all the] while maintaining the illusion of total conformance to the images and symbols of femininity created by patriarchal discourse.[43]

The process involves the mutilation and blending of female identity through the fusion of various body parts. Armand tells of how, on her request, he decapitated Claudia in order to re-attach her head to the body of another adult vampire that would give her the form that she always desired, but instead his attempt created "a writhing jerking catastrophe" that was "a botched reassemblage of the angelic child she had [once] been."[44] Unable to repair the damage and finally succumbing to his jealousy of Lestat and Louis's love for Claudia, he leaves this ruined version of her out in the sunlight to be destroyed. Her perished form can be linked to the notion of the "rotting doll," which acts as a metaphor for "the anger and frustration that are consuming women inside."[45] As is common in many horror texts, the female figure's refusal to adhere to patriarchal rule ensures that she must be removed from the text in order to maintain its social order. Armand's revelation raises the notion of multiple deaths, which is another typical feature of the horror text and can be applied to Claudia, who dies on four occasions; her first death is a false death that occurs on the first night Louis drinks her blood and afterwards is certain that he has murdered her. Her second death is her human death, which happens when Lestat drains her remaining blood and transforms her into their vampire child. Her third death is a staged death whereby Louis believes she died enfolded in Madeline's arms. Her fourth and final death is Armand's experimental head transplant that leads to her sunlight burning, which takes place in the same location as Madeline's earlier annihilation so that their remains are found mixed together.

The amalgamation of female body parts that occurs during this process is prefigured in Claudia's ritualistic fusion of her victim's corpses as detailed in her earlier murder of two female servants. The arrangement of their bodies foreshadows her display with Madeline as the pair is found with "the arm of the mother fastened around the waist of the daughter, the daughter's head bent against the mother's breast."[46] The distortion of their deathly union anticipates the later arrangement of her burned remains, which are found merged with Madeline whose "lovely red hair mingled with the gold of Claudia's hair.... Madeline still bore the stamp of her living face.... But Claudia was ashes."[47]

The warped assemblage of body parts in Claudia's mutilation, attempted reconstruction, and eventual demise, are reminiscent of Hans Bellmers' doll design and photography, which can be subsequently linked to the horror genre. Focused on the beauty and sexualization of young girls and defined by its mutilated figures and distorted poses, his doll project debuted in 1934 and can be read as a protest against the perfectionism of "the Nazi human ideal"[48] that was prevalent in Germany at that time. Bellmer envisions "[t]he female body [as] an endless sentence that invites us to rearrange it so that its real meaning [can] become clear,"[49] and so he creates "an anagram of th[is] body"[50] in his photography; more specifically, he deconstructs and subverts prepubescent female identity through the figure of the doll by deliberately removing appendages and/or replacing them with various objects. They can be categorized within the horror genre as the revised identities of "his little girls, toys, and dolls are often penetrated, decaying or dissecting themselves like a nightmare or a repressed reminiscence of childhood."[51] Bellmer lists Max Reinhardt's operatic adaptation of E. T. A. Hoffman's *The Sandman* as one of his major influences, and admits to being particularly inspired by the destruction of female identity that occurs when Olympia (the life-size doll who has been mistaken for a woman) is "torn limb from limb."[52]

The most obvious reference to Hoffman's Olympia in his work, and one which can also be connected to Claudia's dismemberment, is a photograph marked simply as "Untitled" in *The Doll* (1934), which features a close-up of a disassembled doll figure. While the naked torso, featuring exposed ball joints, dominates most of the frame, it is the placement of the doll's bald head with empty eye sockets and an expressionless face that tends to attract the eye of the viewer. Situated low beside the torso and positioned amongst the various detached limbs, the head signifies the horror of the doll's fragmented identity and can be linked to Claudia in terms of her attempt to escape the infantile form assigned to her by both her fathers and surrogate mother. Like someone struggling to be more than just a doll, she tries to reassemble herself by connecting different pieces together only to end up a mutilated version of herself that resembles Bellmer's grotesque doll figure and so must be destroyed.

Conclusion: Doll as a *memento infanti*

While the doll functions as a sinister and threatening staple of many horror texts, the symbiosis between living girl and inanimate doll explored in this study signifies its representation of patriarchal oppression of women. Furthermore, the cultural practice that links the girl to her doll through the process of mirroring may be considered uncanny since it reveals that which society would prefer to remain hidden. The haunting aspect of the doll, which has an unknown provenance, suggests how "foreign" ideas and tendencies might lurk in the doll, only to be annexed by the girl who bonds to it. Its counterpart within a horror context is that of the wolfman's embodiment of

anxieties surrounding male adolescence and socialization as a hairy sexual predator. The doll-and-child motif as explored in this article is therefore especially significant because it exemplifies how the doll's status as an object of comfort and/or peril is dependent on the perception of its spectator. As personified by Claudia in Rice's text, the doll as a *memento infanti* can be regarded as a melancholic creature whose identity is strictly governed in terms of the very image she represents. Her existence as an emissary between life and death means that she is trapped between the memory of the human girl she once was and a vampire child who can never escape her doll-like form. Madeline's creation of a lady-doll to resemble Claudia, as well as the countless doll replicas of her dead daughter, emphasize the particular relationship between doll, death, and memory, both in relation to Antoly Moskvin's creation of corpse-dolls and the folkloric history of Mexico's *Isla de las Muñecas*. Claudia's decision to seek revenge on those who condemned her to eternity in such a helpless form demonstrates the female figure's endeavor to seek justice for the suffering of her patriarchal bindings. Additionally, her attempt to create a new identity by means of a new physicality shows her potential to transform from a beautiful doll into a grotesque version of herself that relates to Hans Bellmer's mutilated doll design and photography. The various texts that I have used to interpret the doll as a *memento infanti* therefore demonstrate not only the doll's ability to exist beyond the stereotypical function as an ominous or possessed presence, but also its capacity to expand beyond the boundaries of film and literature to become an interdisciplinary figure of the horror text.

Notes

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[2] Ibid., 114.
[3] Susan Yi Sencindiver, "The Doll's Uncanny Soul," in *The Gothic and the Everyday: Living Gothic*, eds. Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Maria Beville (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 125.
[4] Ibid., 116.
[5] Stephen King, *Desperation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2011), 52.
[6] Sencindiver, "The Doll's Uncanny Soul," 116.
[7] Ellen Datlow, *The Doll Collection* (New York: Tor Books, 2015), 13.
[8] Margarita Georgieva, *The Gothic Child* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 108.
[9] Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (London: Little Brown Book Group, 1981), 82–3.
[10] Georgieva, *The Gothic Child*, 120.
[11] Rice, *Interview*, 102.
[12] Ibid.; my emphasis, 104.
[13] Ibid., 108.
[14] Kenneth Gross, *On Dolls* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2012), xiii.
[15] Rice, *Interview*, 110.

[16] Ibid., 111.
[17] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997), 306.
[18] Ibid., 307.
[19] Ibid., 308.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Katherine Ramsland, *The Vampire Companion: The Official Guide to Anne Rice's The Vampire Chronicles* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 107.
[22] Rice, *Interview*, 112–3.
[23] Ibid., 113.
[24] Sencindiver, "The Doll's Uncanny Soul," 113.
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[26] Ibid., 214.
[27] Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances" (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1909), 237.
[28] Freud, "Family Romances," 237.
[29] Rice, *Interview*, 121.
[30] Ibid., 224.
[31] Ibid., 225.
[32] Gross, *On Dolls*, xii.
[33] Andy Soltis, "Horror Dollhouse," *New York Post*, last modified November 8, 2011. http://nypost.com/2011/11/08/horror-dollhouse/.
[34] "Dressing the Dead: Historian's Personal Necropolis," *RT*, last modified November 9, 2011. https://www.rt.com/news/historian-personal-necropolis-video-831/.
[35] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 66.
[36] Ramsland, *The Vampire Companion*, 107.
[37] Jean Baudrillard, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.
[38] *Isla de las Muñecas*, accessed May 2, 2016, http://www.isladelasmunecas.com/.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
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[43] Elsa D. Birmingham Pokory, "(Re)-writing the Body: The Legitimization of the Female Voice, History, Culture and Space in Rosario Ferre's La muneca menor," *Confluencia1* no. 10 (1994): 75–80, 77.
[44] Anne Rice, *The Vampire Armand* (London: Vintage, 1998), 271.
[45] Carmen S. Rivera, "Porcelain Face / Rotten Flesh: The Doll in 'Papeles de Pandora," *Chasqui*, no. 23.2 (1994): 95–101, 96.
[46] Rice, *Interview*, 117.
[47] Ibid., 328.
[48] Jonathan Hirschfeld, "It's a Doll's Life," *Haaretz*, last modified May 8, 2009. http://www.haaretz.com/it-s-a-doll-s-life-1.281528.
[49] Peter Webb and Robert Short, *Hans Bellmer* (New York: Quartet Books, 1985), 177.
[50] Hans Bellmer in Sue Taylor, *The Anatomy of a Body* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2002), 212.

[51] Jeremy Bell, "Uncanny Erotics: On Hans Bellmer' Souvenirs of the Doll," *Feral Feminisms*, no.2 (2014): 71–86, 72.
[52] Peter Webb and Robert Short, *Death, Desire and the Doll: The Life and Art of Hans Bellmer* (Los Angeles: Solar Books, 2008), 22.

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From Post-Modern to Ancient Greco-Roman Horror: Some Remarks for Further Investigations

Nadia Scippacercola
Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Introduction

Everything connected with horror is difficult to manage, as horror is an unwieldly and even an "uncomfortable" topic. It is a sort of taboo subject, and is often associated with Evil, adolescent curiosity, and the unspeakable. It is an ambiguous and evasive concept with an ambivalent effect of lure and repulsion. Sometimes there are no particular mental categories for horror and, consequently, it is not identified at all (mainly when it is mingled with other powerful emotions). On other occasions, we may recognize collective mechanisms of psychological repression or self-censorship when treating this theme. But I believe that a mature and aware civilization should take the feeling of horror seriously and bring it out into the open, without leaving it as a prerogative of a certain group of people who are confronted with it for specific reasons.

A fundamental distinction must be made between real horror and horror experienced by any (artistic, literary, or media) filter. As regards modern literature, it is well known that the British and the Germans contend for the primacy of the literary origins, around the second half of the Eighteenth century, of the "tale of terror," and that the work of Burke, which permitted the entry of concepts other than the Beautiful into the field of aesthetics, is to be considered as an indispensable theoretical reference.[1] From the gloomy atmosphere of the "Gothic novel"—with such examples as H. Walpole (the famous author of 1764 *The Castle of Otranto*), A. Radcliffe, E. T. A. Hoffmann, M. G. Lewis, M. W. Shelley (author of 1818 *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*), C. R. Maturin, and B. Stoker (author of 1897 *Dracula*)—there probably developed, at first contaminated, and then recombined, the vein of contemporary horror literature in its various forms, and in its derivative forms

of movies. Within this general framework, scholars seem unaware that a wider concept or "theme" of "horror" may transcend those narrow historical parameters of the horror genre per se.

In fact, the theme is most certainly worthy of a diachronic study of the spaces of reality and imagination. We might examine horror from a lexical and literary point of view to assess a series of milestones in Greek and Latin thought regarding this significant topic, which is, in contrast, hardly ever treated, by starting from a univocal and unambiguous viewpoint. For the moment, we will present as an example a small set of results of such studies applied to the Ancient Greek novels of the early centuries A.D. These literary works are not historical novels, and are not horror fiction, nor are they philosophical texts, but they may be read as a fictional representation of Greco-Roman life and its horrors.

It is necessary, however, to differentiate between the real and fictional world. First, we shall review some preliminary remarks related to the concept of horror (based on the analysis of some modern psychoanalytic, philosophical, historical, and recent journalistic sources) in order to understand whether horror is inherent in human beings and whether we can historicize situations that cause it. The scope of this article is to make scholars aware of the relevance of this specific topic and its secondary issues found in further studies. The section below presents a definition of horror and discusses real horrors, their effects, their exhibition, the means and the need for mediating horror, and horror fiction; the last section is concerned with cases from the Ancient Greek novels. The following scheme (Figure 1) synthesizes the concepts that will be discussed in detail below.

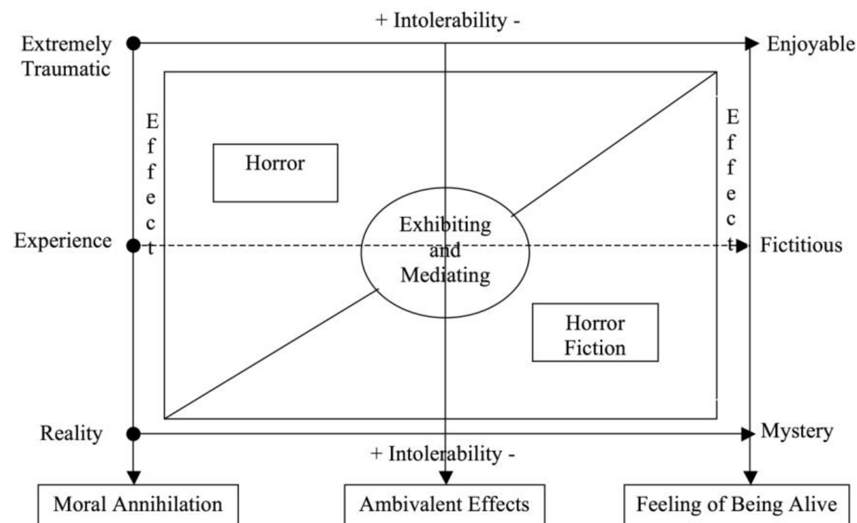

Figure 1: Proposed Plan for the Analysis of Horror with its Features and its Effects.The first type of horror that takes its contents from the real world creates an

extremely traumatic experience, which leads the individual that is receiving the first-hand experience towards moral annihilation. As the experience of horror becomes diluted by being mediated or as it is wholly generated by the realm of fiction, it becomes tolerable and even more enjoyable, and, in fact, induces the individual to take pleasure in life.

Horror

We start with a definition of horror from a medical source:

> Beyond its etymological meaning implying stiffening, shivering, horripilation, *horror* indicates a form of fright mingled with disgust and repugnance. The situations which arouse horror in themselves or in their eventual concatenations appear to upset, warp or spoil the homeostatic integrity (in its broad sense, that is to say, the internal state of balance) of our more stable inner world (our system of aesthetic, moral, and ideal values, *etc.*) or that of "our" external world which is normal and more usual for us. Horror ranges far and wide. It varies in content by subjective reactions: from the simple "ugly" in keeping with our aesthetic norms horror may be aroused by the vision of a disfigured face, a lacerated or sectioned human body, the aftermath of slaughter, a catastrophe, massive war destruction, and happenings which have upset men and things. We may include everything which has the character of the "macabre," as well as certain abnormal sequences, developments of events and situations.[2]

Certain abominable practices or perversions generally arouse feelings of horror among most people. Cannibalism, bestiality, and necrophilia are obscene and sadistic perversions, real albeit rare ones, which tend to produce feelings such as abhorrence and indignation, but which also generally elicit horror. Also, inhumane cruelty, the inhuman absence of any feeling of solidarity and compassion, the total incapacity to identify sympathetically with someone, are characteristic qualities that evoke horror. Therefore, horror is connected with our psychophysical Ego, so the perception of horror, in terms of intolerability, is influenced by our sensitivity. Horror is the perception of a state of being, it stirs the imagination, the space within which the human person proves to himself his own identity in its precariousness. To experience first-hand horror ensuing from real life is an extremely traumatic event against which every mental defence mechanism has little effect.

A disruption in the rules of civil life, produced by men or caused by a serious disaster, brings us face to face with dehumanizing experiences. The failure to recognize anything around us leads to an annihilation of our being.[3]

What proves devastating as experience is not so much the threat to one's own life as the loss of one's sense of "humanity" or of the sense of empathy and pity we usually ascribe to fellow human beings. It goes without saying that from this point of view war, with all its consequences, represents one of the most shocking and pervasive experiences of all.

René Girard invented a theory of society based on recognized mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism as engines of civilization that have existed since the dawn of time:[4] societal cohesion depends on its ability to find a scapegoat against which to join forces and on which to lay everyone's blame. In the end, according to Girard, finding and killing the scapegoat is the best way to strengthen social ties, at least until the next crisis. The human beast, in fact, runs completely wild when respect for other people and their rights is lacking and when there is no realization of a civic and peaceful coexistence. If that occurs, social harmony is replaced by a Hobbesian war of all against all. For Girard, evil seems to be ineradicable,[5] to be the essence of life where it becomes a response, through the exercise of a destructive "will power"—which spills onto one's neighbor, but in fact is working to undo itself—to the nothingness of values and to the incomprehensibility of the world. It is difficult to remain immune to the charms of evil if we realize the essential absurdity of human life.[6] The supreme horror is given not only by the sense of our fragile physical structure,[7] but especially by that of our metaphysical inconsistency.[8] We may become aware through horror of how thin the membrane that separates civilization from total barbarism is and how easily it is broken, or we can learn that all men, positioned in the right circumstances, are capable of anything.[9] We live on the edge of an abyss, and it is not only our higher evolution that prevents us from crossing a decisive boundary, the point of no return, but it is also the hope, the reasonable certainty, that sooner or later someone will come with a solution and that the cavalry sent to save us will appear from behind the hill.[10]

Exhibiting and Mediating Horror

Horror may be exhibited: you may make a ruthless, malevolent, and cynically wise use of human life. An enemy can exploit horror as a message in the hope that contemplating the depths of evil may induce us to surrender by evoking our worst nightmares. Additionally, gruesome executions shared on the Internet as form of enacting a propaganda strategy are well known to all (lately, *e.g.*, Mexican drug cartel executions, ISIS beheading videos).

Thus, in dealing with the horror coming from the real world, we come across a number of actors: 1) circumstances or 2) beings who produce a horrifying event, 3) the victims, and 4) the audience. If we were to think in accordance with the images provided by the ancient myths, which often work in terms of archetypal composition, then we would ask ourselves: "Who holds Medusa's head?" and let us remember that the hero himself is now intimately compromised and assimilated to the monster whose severed head he wields as

a macabre trophy. Horror is the feeling of death that we try so hard to avoid in every way, and which we can only withstand by looking at it through its "reflection in a mirror," by a mediation that allows its distancing. If for the ancient Greeks to witness the pain of a death was equivalent to a "contamination," now we know that the horror victim's anguish as the anguish of those who observed that horror never leaves anyone pure and uncorrupted.[11]

Pornography of Violence and the Need for Storytelling

The term "Roman holiday" is used to refer to the cruel games that entertained the public by engaging gladiators in mortal combat with a person or a wild animal in the Roman arena. It was intended as a form of leisure-time entertainment and represents a historical example of "socializing violence." The body, after all, was the main target for criminal repression, and cruel treatment of prisoners was acceptable as public spectacle until the dissemination of Enlightenment values.[12] The forms of punishment were ruthless precisely because they had a function of intimidation, acting as deterrents: in this way, they were understood as "teaching tools." Only constant denunciation and indignation in societies informed by the Enlightenment have brought about change in certain parts of the world.

A certain mesmeric effect, morbid curiosity, and a kind of voyeurism for horror scenes are innate in the human race. Fascination with death is a kind of psychological and biological need, related to our survival instinct, to understand the dynamics of and to give a personal sense to the macabre event—all with the desire to be reassured that it will never happen to us. It is also possible to catch a glimpse, through alternating, often conflicting, emotions, of the intensity of our empathic participation in the pain of others.[13] The German language has a precise term to describe the delight in another person's misfortune, namely *Schadenfreude*. Spying on horror has always been one of the dark sides of the human soul that only taboos, culture, and educated sensitivity hold in check and moderate. Nevertheless, because of a certain "exoticism of horror," the "distance" attenuates the empathy and the emotional involvement of audience of horrific events. All that may in part explain the case of the *Rotten.com* website, "An archive of disturbing illustration," and perhaps even such phenomena such horror tourism.[14]

Even in journalism or fiction, it is not always easy to define the boundaries between the search for truth, ethical intentions, and emotional exploitation.[15] Horror acts as a good catalyst of the emotions, but humanity also needs to explain evil, to deal with the most excruciating pain, and to overcome the threshold to see where horror hides. You can read Seneca or St. Augustine—and all other great literature focused on grief—to examine the notion of evil and pain, or you can grasp them through concrete examples from the everyday life.[16]

Horror Fiction

"Horror Fiction" refers to a literary or cinematic genre that is based on the feelings of fear, shock, or disgust. Horror as depicted in literature, in stories, and in imaginative productions deserves a separate discussion. Fiction is a much more fertile field than real life, because it contains the whole of the latter and something more that cannot be found in real life. On the other hand, real life is always more terrible than fiction, but the deepest terror always has mental origins: what generates the deepest thrill is indeed mystery.[17]

Confirming all the good old tenets of Gothic horror, Spiritism, and occultism in the foreground and magic that offers an expanded and not well-defined dimension, we can add also all fears and anxieties deriving from a specific society to motifs that cause horror in the fictional ambit. The fear of the disappearance of one's reference points, cosmic horror (profitably developed by Weird and New Weird fiction),[18] apocalyptic scenarios, perverse appearances, revenge, bestiality, and the lies of the mind are many metaphors of the dark side of reality: all of these serve as a set of stories and symbolic representations for evil.[19] Furthermore, some literature that includes supernatural elements is based on war plans against the Devil. By reviewing this catalog of horror images, we realize how this genre is fundamentally allegorical: it deals with stories at the intersection of what can happen and symbolic unconsciousness. It incorporates the folkloric and popular traditions inherited from our ancestors,[20] but the horror genre also develops the fear of separation and the theme of identity.[21] It acts as a filter between what we can internalize without danger and what we need to get rid of. To tell us, that is, our number one fear, namely the shape of the corpse under the sheet: our own corpse.

In search of Catharsis: Deception and Self-deception

The first feature of horror literature is to mystify reality, comparing it to an imagination that embodies all of human fears and therefore it should also face the general rehearsal of our death. The representation of these two truths becomes almost surreal, like a fight between two entities that do not belong in the same space-time plane. And the duality, the eternal struggle between good and evil, in all its forms,[22] is one of the major archetypes of this narrative current that has always fascinated and caused people to tremble with fear.[23]

Horror fiction can assume such social purposes as social criticism and denunciation or the stigmatization of free love or libertine sexuality and can be anchored to different learning and emotional needs within most ethically important productions, which come to disrupt the audience's certainties and consciousness.[24] But its fictional dimension represents in every way a space for experimentation in which it is possible not only to explore our feelings, to test our courage in facing fears, but also our ability to tame their effects. To give a shape to fears still represents an attempt to exorcise them. The unknown and

the mystery represented by the afterlife and "the other" are scary, and horror is the only genre that explores these dimensions of the human experience. Identifying ourselves in our virtual alter-egos—through a process made even more evident in survival video games and action horror—we explore without (apparent)[25] harm the fearful threshold of death, finally enjoying the restoration of our normality. So, it reminds us that we are living and that there is still something special, something unique and extraordinary in being alive.

A Very Ancient Lesson

It might come as a surprise that the ancient Greeks may have prepared the road to an "aesthetic of horror," in truth, not only do they appear to have reflected on the intensity and nuances of feelings that produce horror in literary fiction, but they also used a series of horrific themes to move and direct the hearts of their readers or listeners towards various emotional effects.[26] Wishing at this point to leave aside the most ancient dramatic productions, which are insuperable guides in the representation of the ethical and mythical recomposition of inner human conflicts, let's focus on ancient narrative, where we can find a large sample. Ancient fiction, inasmuch as forming a significant section of a wider "entertainment literature" of the Greco-Roman world, if on the one hand it is set in a literary space that brings together an impressive cultural patrimony, it is on the other hand the representation of a slice of life in which feelings and emotions of everyday life can find a place. In fact, ancient literature becomes a show-case wherein a range of human behaviors is displayed, allowing for the audience's empathy and involvement to come about.

The Greek love novels such as Chariton's *Chaireas and Callirhoe* (mid 1st cent. A.D.–beginning 2nd cent. A.D.), Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaka* (1st–2nd cent. A.D.), Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (circa mid 2nd cent. A.D.), and Heliodoros' *Aithiopika* (not before the 3rd cent. A.D. or 4th cent. A.D.)[27] have a constant narrative scheme in common: a pair of lovers pass through a series of terrible obstacles and adventures to meet up again later in the inevitable happy ending.[28] Each of these novels presents horrific elements to various degrees and according to their own individual narrative conventions.[29] We note that: 1) we adapt our judgement to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer; 2) the story-teller has a *peculiarly* directive power over us and over the current of our emotions. The author can obtain a great variety of effects from the same material. Thus, we see how emotional effects can be independent of the actual subject-matter, in the world of fiction.[30]

In Chariton's novel horror seems to arise both from the events of the novelistic reality as well as from the supernatural dimension.[31] The horrific elements in Chariton's novel are at times used to create comic effects or contribute towards generating a mixture of contrasting sensations in the characters, or emphasize a moment of melodrama. They can also create a moment of fear, but usually they generate anxieties which melt away in an

event that leaves one pleasantly astonished.

In Xenophon Ephesius's novel terms do not appear that define the sensations of horror, even though elements directed towards arousing horror occur. The latter come in good part from the human soul, which generates the dramatic events of novelistic reality.[32] In this novel, moreover, the macabre theme of necrophilia is treated, but the reader, like the hero, should not feel disgust or disapproval at the way in which the author presents this topic. Indeed, the supernatural disturbs the world of the *Ephesiaka*.[33] In conclusion, here the horrific elements connote moments of communication with the supernatural, they are also adopted in this narration to create *suspense*, to generate fear, and to arouse horror in the very characters that populate the novel, but seemingly not in the reader, who would listen in amusement. On other occasions, they perform an educational or melodramatic function, by exaggerating the tones and narrative efficacy of a certain event.

In Achilles Tatius's novel the author seems to have wanted to pay greater narrative attention to emotions and their nuances; that focus is made possible by the protagonist's first-person narration. This is why horror also is expressed more than once through a wide range of elements. Horror is in recurrent association with myths (Ach.Tat. 3.7–8: description of painting of Andromeda and Prometheus; 5.3–5: the story of Philomela; and 8.6: episode with Pan), the supernatural, and the very reality of the novel.[34] A notable feature of this novel is the strong desire of the novelist to elicit a sense of horror in his reader, as in his characters. In this novel horror seems to have an ambivalent use: on some occasions, the context is serious and pathetic, but at other times the novelist seems to be making fun of his reader as in the first of the heroine's three deaths. The novel is pervaded by the taste for the unusual, but the novelist's playful and ironic character emerges on various occasions: Achilles Tatius—who is a master in the effects of *suspense*—undoubtedly knows that horror with its adrenaline rush does in fact titillate his audience.

In Heliodoros horror is the direct result of a novelistic reality dominated by the supernatural. For the exceptional protagonists of *Aithiopika*, a superior design has been devised, which is gradually revealed in the course of the novel's events.[35] In this novel horror contributes towards generating mystery and *suspense*. It also creates fear and terror, and it stresses the close network of communications with the supernatural world, moreover it confers a pathetic note on certain situations. But horror too—and the reactions to be adopted with regard to it—becomes part of the educational picture of Heliodoros' novel by offering points and occasions of edification for the reader.[36]

In sum, in the ancient Greek novels horror gives emphasis to certain particular moments or events; it is often experienced together with other feelings; and at times it is a result of *pathos*. But horror is always functional for the artistic and narrative rendering of a certain emotional expression: *e.g.* comic effects, melodramatic tones, thrills, mystery, and terror atmospheres. The presence of horrific elements in the plots of these novels is considerable but not oppressive, and it is always effective. Nonetheless, behind the appearances

of the "normal" (novelistic) world we may recognize a hidden world of terror and horror. It is precisely in this way that violence also appears in all its brutality, as a manifestation of the darkest aspects of human nature.[37] The supernatural becomes disturbing in its oneiric or real expressions; sacrificial rites are distorted into cruel and repugnant practices, and corpses are deprived of death by the means of horrible necromantic or wicked rituals and deranging games of Fate. For the reader or listener of the novels these negative elements are naturally filtered through the literary filter; the narrative expression of horror brings "negative" components into focus from real life and tries to make pleasant or to exorcise events that certainly would not create amusement in real life. Through horror, however, are revealed terrors connatural with daily life: the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of circumstances, fear of ferocious barbarians, the outburst of willful violence, and the manifestation of some disquieting supernatural event. A source of disquiet is connatural with the oneiric dimension: dreams or visions are present in all the novels under examination, but some passages are distinguished for their liveliness and the crudity of the images represented or for the effect that they cause on the sleeper. In most cases, the subject affected by the nightmare wakes up with a start, being seized by panic. The fictional nights are disturbed by dreams or visions in which inhuman monstrous beings, perverse divinities, shadows, and dead people all make their appearance.[38] Such fearful supernatural creatures, which contribute towards defining—what I call—a latent horrifying component of the ancient Greek novel, also seem to make their appearance in a state of waking. In all the novels examined in fact not only are references to ghosts and demons encountered, but also considerations of an explanatory character regarding the modalities of apparition of those creatures. The novelists treat similar themes in a moderate and nonchalant manner, and precisely for this are relevant; they show and share a patrimony of beliefs in keeping with the ancient tradition regarding such terrifying beings, which are readily accepted in the "real" world of their novels. Thus, besides and apart from every literary referent, the stories of the ancient Greek novels prove to be sensitive to the reception of "news reports," items and suggestions, anxieties and fears of their epoch and it is in this way that we are able also to recognize horror associated with apparent death, with re-awakenings in the tombs, with tomb desecrators, with healers, with sorcerers, with phantoms, with zombies, and with the cruel sacrificers of men. Behind the exceptional normality of the world of the novel, the depths of the human souls of its characters or the surprising destiny of the protagonist couple, a "dark side" emerges in the ancient novel: it is nurtured on monstrous practices contemporary and well-known to the audience, but it also feeds on some dreams or visions—and on some hallucinations—of those who with this fictitious reality come together and clash in an attempt to understand and dominate its "uncanny" dynamics.

Notes

[1] See, *e.g.*, Carsten Zelle, *'Angenehmes Grauen.' Literaturhistorische Beiträge zur Ästhetik des Schrecklichen im Achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987), and Hans Richard Brittnacher, *Ästhetik des Horrors* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994). Cf. Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Dodsley, 1759[2]).

[2] I translate from Leandro Canestrelli, "*s.v.* Paura," in *Enciclopedia Medica Italiana* 11, ed. Luciano Vella, (Firenze: USES Edizioni Scientifiche, 1984), cols. 1346–1362, 1358–59.

[3] In the struggle for adaptation, horror would initiate a series of powerful defences against the most repugnant realities against which it is not possible to put forward any constructive adaptation. One can only confront certain realities through flight, or by attempting to destroy them, otherwise one is doomed to succumb. Love of hate fills us with horror, see James Alexander, "On the Affect of Horror," *Bulletin of Philadelphia Association of Psychoanalysis* 22, no. 2 (1972): 196–209.

[4] Within the community, all individuals are in constant tension with each other, because they all grow up by imitating others and, therefore, they aim at the same goals and desire the same things. But there are not enough objects of desire for everyone, so that individuals compete with each other, generating a rivalry the tension of which is to be reduced before the community loses its cohesion. He expressed this theory in several works, amongst which René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, *1972).*

[5] Absolute horror and the triumph of barbarism is partly constrained by human irrationality: by the dichotomic nature of the human being, a being intimately divided between beauty and horror, that many times throughout its history has shown an inclination towards cruelty while at times a yearning for self-destruction.

[6] Whenever a totalizing process of secularization of the divine is activated, the desire of man, forced between the terror of death and the metaphysical aspirations towards the sublime and towards the transcendence, albeit denied, may become the driving force and the reason for actions tragically guided by a sense of omnipotence and desire of immortality.

[7] Freud wrote: "There is scarcely any other matter, however, upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin disguise, as our relation to death... It is true that the statement 'All men are mortal' is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a general proposition; but no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality. Religions continue to dispute the importance of the undeniable fact of individual death and to postulate a life after death; civil governments still believe that they cannot maintain moral order among the living if they do not uphold the prospect of a better life hereafter as a recompense for mundane existence. In our great cities, placards announce lectures that undertake to tell us how to get in touch with the souls of the departed; and it cannot be denied that not a few of the most able and penetrating minds among our men of science have come to the conclusion, especially towards the close of their own lives, that a contact of this kind is not impossible," transl. James Strachey, "The 'Uncanny'," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 17, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 217–256, 240–41.

[8] See Leszek Kołakowski, *Metaphysical Horror*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
[9] The encounter with horror can also occur on the mental level: there are individuals who harbor evil and wickedness. In order to interpret the human degradation in malice and selfishness you could find the key in the feeling of envy, in turn generated by discontent and loneliness, but it is often established in a system of social and moral corruption in its support. The categories of good and evil, in historic and global practices, are not applicable in an absolute manner, but it is difficult to describe the sense of vertigo that causes the encounter with the inconceivable that occurs when a horrific episode contradicts and subverts "our" reasons, when we realize that hatred can explode at any time. Evil lurks—and grows—within us and can sometimes arise from a form of sick and deviant love. So, who are the monsters? Where are we to hide?
[10] Tragedy often reveals incredible cohesion, as it can spread the spirit of brotherhood and give us a different perception of small things. We realize that there are good and bad on all sides; there are also those who sacrifice their lives to save others. Beyond the devastating fears and contradictions must be set a heartfelt celebration of life and of its desperate search for meaning. The only possible victory is that of humanity: there is the need to think together, rejoice together, and dream together. Then we must leave our own restricted needs and interests, and offer a poetic resistance against the horror that advances and that cancel out everything. To give an emotional meaning to nonsense and to the absurdity of existence for what it is, is a function of art. The mystical inspiration that joins reality and fiction allows you to enjoy the spectacle of human smallness, thereby recovering our highest dignity. A man is not a man in comparison with another man, but compared to a universe of sublime beauty, of which he is an integrant and unrepeatable part. Human beings can be also creators of beauty.
[11] It is no secret that the human evil, as the banality of the same, becomes easily a habit and normality for the same people who undergo it. The adaptive response allows us to become accustomed to horror. But habit is an analgesic and an anesthetic: in small doses, it helps us to survive and to accept reality, in large and repeated doses makes us insensitive, by annihilating us deeply: you can become like an automaton as not to suffer more, but life will only be a deception. But one may become accustomed even to the words that try to tell us and to the images that show us it. There is a moral and ethical danger in hiding: a society that forgets the inherent dignity/sacredness of human life, that loses its sense of humanity, of the respect for the others and their sorrows, becomes the culture of death.
[12] See, *e.g.* Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975.
[13] We may recall the words of *De rerum natura*, the first-century BC didactic poem by the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius: "Suaue mari magno turbantibus aequora uentis, / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem, / non quia uexari quemquamst iucunda uoluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suaue est; / per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli / suaue etiam belli certamina magna tueri," (2.1–6), original text by Enrico Flores, ed., *Titus Lucretius Carus: "De rerum natura"*, vol. 1 (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2002); "Pleasant it is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation: not because any man's troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from

yourself is pleasant. Pleasant is it also to behold great encounters of warfare arrayed over the plains, with no part of yours in the peril," transl. William H. D. Rouse, *Lucretius On the Nature of Things*, rev. Martin F. Smith (Cambridge, Mass./London: Loeb, 1924), 95.

[14] See, *e.g.* John Lennon and Malcom Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. London: Continuum, 2000.

[15] The power of images can come to destabilize the viewer and the "emotional truth," needless to deny it, works as a powerful moral compulsion, whether it is the sense of horror to push us towards reaction by influencing our attitude.

[16] It is an innate need of human being: with the desire to tame the fear of evil, to look at its face, to live it through the others' experiences, to exorcise it, and to unload it by oneself, and, perhaps, to immunize oneself and to learn how to master it. Ever since we were kids we had learnt to figure out where the ogre is hiding, we need to give him a face and to delimit him within some borders, in a place, in a face. Because we are miserably yet beautifully mortals.

[17] As a clear example we can mention *Thriller*, Michael Jackson's single, the song and the video, produced by Quincy Jones, released in January 23, 1984, which makes a clever use of figures and terrifying situations described with artistry and represents a concentration of terror.

[18] H. P. Lovecraft defined himself as a weird writer and in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* gave a functional, albeit picturesque, description of it, claiming that in fact this genre was not limited to mysterious homicides, bloodbones, and resounding chains, but that it succeeded in creating an atmosphere of fear of the unknown and of the presence of unknown forces: the most terrible experience of the human brain, he claims, is destruction or even the simple suspension of fixed rules of Nature; see Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature as Revised in 1936*. Arlington, Virginia: Carrollton-Clark, 1974.

[19] The horror genre is based on a conscious fiction, a ludic mechanism, and it uses metaphors that come to touch the strings of the most ancestral fears of human being. The point is clear: if we consider the language through which it expresses itself, which is built around symbolic elements such as monsters, whether they be the werewolf, the vampire, or the zombie. It causes us thus to wonder about life after death and about the possible limbo between these two worlds, by means of the figures of the ghost or the demonic creatures. The theme of possession, in turn, is linked to one of the most feared nightmares, namely the loss of self. The interior excavation fishes among the most fragile and morbid aspects of individual psychology: the masks, the dark sides of personality, from the poor to the powerful ones, madness, sadism, the theme of "the mad doctor," contagion, epidemics, and so on.

[20] According to a psychoanalytical interpretation, the horrid mythological creatures could be projections into the external world of sadistic fantasies generating a sense of guilt that take the form of a myth. Incarnations that are produced on the wave of a phenomenon-type *lextalionis* and could always possess a substratum of truth, see Alexander, "On the Affect of Horror," 196–209.

[21] *E.g.* through the misuse of twins figures or children.

[22] Bataille wrote: "Evil seems to be understandable, but only to the extent in which Good is the key to it. If the luminous intensity of Good did not give the night of Evil its blackness, Evil would lose its appeal," Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans.

Alastair Hamilton (London: *Calder & Boyars Ltd.*, *1973)*, 147.

[23] And one of the major reasons we go to scary movies is to be scared. But the scare we crave is a safe one. "We know that, in an hour or two, we're going to walk out whole,... We're not going to have any holes in our head, and our hearts will still be in our bodies... If we have a relatively calm, uneventful lifestyle, we seek out something that's going to be exciting for us, because our nervous system requires periodic revving, just like a good muscular engine," said Stuart Fischoff, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles, as reported by Sharon Begley, "Why Our Brain Love Horror Movies," *Daily Beast*, October 26, 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/10/25/why-our-brains-love-horror-movies-fear-catharsis-a-sense-of-doom.html, accessed April 30, 2016. To see a movie of this type would be like taking a roller coaster ride, there is the adrenaline, but with the confidence that everything will end well and you will remain unharmed.

[24] Or may remain at more mediocre levels, like that of the exploitation films in their various subgenres, splatter or gore, torture-porn or films that point exclusively towards the startle effect.

[25] Leaving aside the powers of suggestion, there is a lively debate about a non-regulated use of similar entertainment modalities that could lead towards an alteration of the mechanisms of social empathy and even of recognition of the limits between reality and fiction.

[26] We presented a selection of literary testimonies in ancient Greek of various epochs (from the mid 8thcentury BC to the late Byzantine period) in Nadia Scippacercola, "What Have the Ancient Greeks Taught Us about Horror? A Brief Review of the Concept in the Classical World," in *Fearful Symmetries*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012.

[27] The dating of Greek novels is a controversial matter, bibliographical reference to which are omitted here.

[28] Browsing through the pages of any of the love stories, we readily come across a series of negative elements: robbers' attacks (Char. 1.9–10; Hld. 5.6–7 and 8.16), clashes with pirates (X.Eph. 1.12–14; Hld. 5.24–25), unfortunate shipwrecks (Char. 3.3; X.Eph. 3.2), attempted suicides (Char. 2.8–9; 3.5; 5.10; 6.2 and 7.1; X.Eph. 3.6–7. Hld. 1.17; 2.1–5; 8.15), brutal homicides (X.Eph. 3.2; 3.12; 4.5; Hld. 1.12; 1.30–31), battles and guerrilla warfare (Char. 7.4–6; X.Eph. 5.2–4; Hld. 1.1–2 ~ 1.22 and 5.32–33; 6.12–13; 9 *passim*), tragic or premature deaths (Hld. 2.20; 2.29; 8.7–8); mortal punishment (Char. 3.4; 4.3; X.Eph. 4.2; 4.6 and 8.8–9); and every kind of violence (Char. 1.4–5; X.Eph. 5.5; Hld. 1.11; 7.6; 10.31–32. Char. 3.7; 4.2. X.Eph. 1.6; Hld. 8.5–6. Char. 1.10; X.Eph. 2.11; 3.8). Even more notable are the "uncanny elements" recognizable in these narrations: the continuous game with life and death that is manifested in the topos of apparent death and the subsequent *anabiōsis* (*E.g.* Char. 1.4; X.Eph. 3.5; 3.7; Ach.Tat. 3.15–22 and 5.7; Hld. 2.3–5 and 8.7), the consummation of a cruel rite such as human sacrifice with or without ritual anthropophagy (X.Eph. 2.13; Ach.Tat. 3.15–22; Hld. 10.6–9 and 16–17), the practice of necromancy (Hld. 6.14–15), necrophiliac indulgencies (X.Eph. 5.1), the presence of disturbing dreams, of ambiguous oracular responses, the amazing supernatural (X.Eph. 4.2; Hld. 8.8–9), appearances of ghosts, magical elements, funereal features (Char. 1.6 and 4.1; X.Eph. 3.2; Hld. 2.18), and macabre happening (Char. 1.8; X.Eph. 5.7; Hld. 2.5–14).

[29] For a fuller treatment and articulated discussion on the sources of these literary horrors I refer to Nadia Scippacercola, "Il romanzo greco e la necromanzia," *Vichiana* s. 4.11, no. 2 (2009): 209–235; *Il lato oscuro del romanzo greco. Supplementi di "Lexis" diretti da Vittorio Citti e Paolo Mastandrea no. 62* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert Editore, 2011) and "L'inquieto mondo dei romanzi greci," in *Dalla civiltà classica all'umanesimo. Studi dei dottori di ricerca del Dipartimento. Pubblicazioni del Dipartimento di Filologia Classica "F. Arnaldi"*(Napoli: Editpress, 2014), 271–302.

[30] Freud himself has asked why it is that the severed hand in the story of the treasure of Rhampsinitus (Hdt. 2.121) has no uncanny effect in the way that the severed hand has in Hauff's story (*Die Geschichte von der abgehauenen Hand*); then, he himself answered: "In the Herodotus story our thoughts are concentrated much more on the superior cunning of the master-thief than on the feelings of the princess. The princess may very well have had an uncanny feeling, indeed she very probably fell into a swoon; but *we* have no such sensations, for we put ourselves in the thief's place, not in hers," transl. Strachey, "The 'Uncanny,'" 246 and 252.

[31] The reader of this novel experiences horror together with the heroine when she lives through a terrible event: the young woman wakes up from her sleep and finds herself buried alive in the grave. Then, imprisoned in the tomb she hears a terrible din and imagines that the souls of the dead are coming to take her away. But in fact, it is the grave robbers. So, it is the heroine now restored to life who will terrorize the robbers themselves who fear a fanciful demon of the tomb. And a demon will be called upon: that of the (live) protagonist Chaereas. Finally, the two young lovers will reappear alive and well before their companions after their "death," to the astonishment of all those present.

[32] In this work, human action exerts considerable influence: the same protagonists struggle against adverse destiny with strong personal initiative. The heroine is forced to kill herself and to kill in order not to be overcome by the relentless series of evil events. But when the woman finds herself alive in the tomb, far from being terrorized, she takes exception to it; when the thieves take her away she shows herself to be still tenaciously attached to her decision to kill herself.

[33] It is made manifest in horrific nightmares. But yet again it is the heroine who dominates the events by using fears, superstitions, and prejudices regarding demons and diseases in her salvation: she pretends to suffer from epilepsy and recounts a horrible story, purporting that the disease was transmitted to her by a supernatural being that possessed her as a child.

[34] When, for example, we are present at the atrocious death of two unfortunate young people. Achilles Tatius for his literary creation has also drawn from the unavowable instinct for anthropophagy: the heroine is disemboweled and her innards are roasted and consumed by her executioners. This horrific scene is matched by the lugubrious resurrection of the young woman made by the Egyptian Menelaus. Leucippe will then die again, first decapitated by the pirates and later she will make herself believed to have been assassinated by hired killers. And the hero will be frightened by the (possible) apparition of her ghost on the waters of the sea.

[35] The hero Thiamis has an ambiguous and disquieting divine vision: the terrible sacrificial images that are presented to his mind will come to life in slaughter; Isis commands him to commit a murder or, in the best of hypotheses, the defloration of the novel's protagonist; but the reality will be revealed to be different. Still in the

oneiric images the heroine Charikleia is visited by a violent man who plucks one of her eyes out; her stepfather Charikles sees dark shadowy ghosts that appear to herald death and so on. There are then the uncanny events of the cave that revolve around the dead body of a mysterious woman.

[36] At times, the reader experiences the horror together with characters of the novel but it is relevant that in this work it seems that—based on the example of the protagonists—a "correct," "right" model of behavior is imposed on the reader, which provides for an attitude of superior detachment towards the material reality, however horrific or uncanny it may be. The protagonists demonstrate examples of firmness and courage, in their presumed meetings with the ghosts. So, after an initial moment of horror and bewilderment, the heroine will overcome her fear of the dreadful necromancy she finds herself witnessing. At the same time, the cowardly character Knemon suffers the criticism of the other characters and is subjected to horrific twists of Fate.

[37] See also Nadia Scippacercola, "La violenza nel romanzo greco," *Lexis* 28, (2010): 399–431.

[38] Human bodies appear in the mind of the sleeper deformed into unnatural fusions, metamorphoses, and mutilations; in a jumble of dark passions, visions and disquieting symbols transfigure sexual embraces and images of defloration. The couples of lovers in the dreams are threatened by terrible creatures armed with arms and fire which, attacking them with swift brutality, perform—or likewise intimate to perform—acts of willful violence or demand human sacrifices.

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“Hurrah for Hanging”: Monsters, Irony, and the Contested Meaning of Horror for Nineteenth-Century America

Jeffrey A. Mullins
St. Cloud State University

In March of 1846, Walt Whitman (then only twenty-six years old) penned a barbed article entitled “Hurrah for Hanging” in the *Brooklyn Eagle* newspaper of which he was the editor. He recounted “the dark and dreadful narrative” of the “precocious monster Freeman, the butcher of five human beings” just a week previous. William Freeman had entered the central New York State home of the Van Nest family, killing the majority of them before fleeing the scene. The Freeman case quickly became connected to another “brutal murder,” in the same town, within a year, wherein Henry Wyatt stabbed Thomas Gordon. The local papers in Cayuga County labeled these as acts of “horrid murder” and the perpetrators as examples of a “monster in human form.” As scholars have demonstrated, this rhetoric of “gothic horror” was common to the early nineteenth century, especially as applied to violent crimes. National newspapers followed suit in using such images, and over the following months the country watched as the courtroom drama played out. A closer look at Whitman’s writings in this period—and at the discourse on “horror” more broadly—produces a more complicated picture than one might initially imagine.

How are we to understand the antebellum American encounters with horror? Modern conceptions of horror can seem to stem directly from this era. Present-day analysts of popular culture often view this earlier era as a seedbed of horror, the birthplace of such quintessential monsters as Dracula and Dr. Frankenstein’s creation. Often there is the assumption that this was a time when the genre had its original character as something truly shocking, and only later was it approached in the vein of irony or camp. Implicit in this view is the assumption that concepts of horror emerged from literature, and then spread to culture more broadly.

When one actually examines the history of the early nineteenth century, however, two things quickly become evident. First, that ideas about horror emerged from a ranged of lived experiences (especially crime) at least as much as it did from literature. Contemporaries most frequently invoked "horror" to convey a sense of shock and implicit disapproval of some deed or state of affairs in the world around them. This rhetoric of horror might be used to comment on extreme criminal violence, but also on social, political, or religious events and trends. Secondly, that the dialogue on horror was quite well developed by the 1840s—so much so, in fact, that many of the invocations of "horror" were themselves ironic commentaries on the concept. In his 1846 article, Whitman proceeds to mock those who claim to be horrified, noting that their treatment of Freeman—an impoverished and socially marginalized black laborer—helped to bring about his degradation. Whitman predicted that the standard course of events would "lead the representatives of society in due time to paddle in *his* blood, as he in that of his victims." Thus, while the antebellum notion of "horror" had some routine characteristics, contemporaries utilized it in such a range of situations, sometimes to contradictory ends, that it becomes difficult to treat it as a single, stable concept. It makes more sense, then, to explore the range rhetorical situations in which people actually employed the rhetoric of horror. By doing so, we can better identify both the concerns that motivated people to utilize the language of "horror" and the patterns and fissures in contemporary usage.

What exactly does Whitman mean by his criticism of those deploying the language of horror? As with so many others in this era, Whitman's engagement with the concept of horror was thoroughly enmeshed with a highly-charged political and cultural debate. Beginning in the 1820s, many Americans participated in a loosely connected set of endeavors aimed at reforming American society. Some of these, such as expanding the public school system, enjoyed widespread support. Others, such as abolitionism, were highly controversial. The push to abolish capital punishment on humanitarian grounds proved to be both politically and culturally divisive. Even as some people emphasized the "monstrous" or "horrific" character of many murders in their arguments to retain the death penalty, others labeled the institution of capital punishment itself as the horrific act. In an era when optimism about changing people for the better ran high, simply killing those who had transgressed struck many as the true descent into the horrific. Such was the conceptual foundation for Whitman's critique of sending criminals to the gallows.

Using the debate surrounding the William Freeman and Henry Wyatt murder trials as a way into such debates, this essay will pursue three goals. First, to explore the ways in which the concept of "horror" is fundamentally shaped by other elements of the era and the cultural setting in which it exists. The primary focus here will be the early nineteenth century, since many have treated this as the seedbed of "horror" in the sense conveyed by gothic fiction, but some attention will be given to immediate antecedents. Second, to examine

some of the ways in which the very concept of "horror" has been contested—both in its core meaning and in its various appropriations—from its earliest stages. Third, to investigate how competing characterizations of horror were applied to some of the most violent of real-world crimes, in a struggle to fulfill one or the other of two conflicting visions of society.

Cultural Horror

That the early nineteenth century had a robust dialogue on horror is not news. Typically, however, both scholarly and popular understandings of the genesis of modern conceptions of horror focus on the literary origins of the genre. On the face of it, this seems entirely natural for the era that gave us Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), not to mention Edgar Allen Poe's writings (e.g. "The Raven," 1845). On closer inspection, however, one finds that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century witnessed a broader cultural shift in the cluster of concepts around horror, monsters, and inhumanity. The narratives of such beings as Dracula and Dr. Frankenstein's creation—what modern-day popular culture often considers as quintessential monsters—emerge out of this broader cultural shift. This section sketches the genesis of "horror" as used in the nineteenth century, and captures some of the range of straightforward (i.e. un-ironic) uses to which contemporaries put it.

The term "horror" has been around, in some form, since the Middle Ages. It took on many of the associations that we currently have of it, however, during the early nineteenth century. Dictionaries at the era gave such (brief) definitions as "terror mixed with detestation" and "excessive fear, terror."[1] Changes in conceptualizations of human nature were a central component in nineteenth-century ideas about horror. One of the key indicators of a shift in American understandings of human nature was how contemporaries conceptualized the act of murder, and the character of the murderer. As Daniel Cohen has traced, for much of the colonial era executions were public affairs, and ministers used them as an occasion for edifying their flocks. Because everyone possessed a corrupt soul (caused by the original sin of Adam and Eve), anyone might fall into sinful habits. And one sin would lead to another, until someone ended up committing extreme acts.[2] The Rev. Charles Chauncy believed that human revulsion to such acts was universal, telling the audience at an 1754 public execution, "We know of no People, however rude and uncultivated, in other Respects, but have entertained a kind of *Horror* at the Sin of *Murder*; judging it worthy of some remarkable Punishment."[3] Horror, then, was often understood as a universal trait of humanity, a sensibility that would reliably react to extreme acts of violence.

While some of the eighteenth-century sense of the universality of horror would carry forward, by the early nineteenth century the cultural venues for discussing and explaining crime—especially murder—had shifted. Sermons at executions, meant to warn others away from following a path that would lead

to a similar fate, became far less popular. Taking their place were crime narratives that emphasized several features of the act. As Karen Halttunen has stated, the new crime narratives "inflated language and graphic treatments of violence and its aftermath in order to shock the reader into an emotional state that mingled fear with hatred and disgust." Furthermore, even as an Enlightenment-spawned inquiry sought to find motives for horrific acts of murder, contemporaries increasingly began to think that many crimes were fundamentally inexplicable. The motivations of the killer remained a mystery because, in extreme cases, the perpetrator was not like other people. Indeed, they were monsters, humans only in form, without the basic conscience that was required for genuine personhood.[4]

While the language of horror most typically emerged in descriptions of murders, at least two aspects of the relatively straightforward deployment of the rhetoric of horror deserve mention here. First, the deeds referred to by this rhetoric were not always direct attacks by one person upon another. So it was that crimes such as arson might be given the description of "Monstrous Villainy."[5] Second, the crimes did not even need to involve violence. Whitman labeled as "Brutal Villainy" the seduction by two married men—using assumed names—of two young women in Philadelphia. Considering the whole realm of crime and criminals, he thought that, "Among all we have read or heard of cold hearted villainies…there are few that in deliberate wickedness, surpass" the actions of these two culprits.[6] The rhetoric of horror thus found a wide range of embodiments, even early in its history.

While narratives about crime were probably the most common venue for engagements with the rhetoric of horror in the early nineteenth century, contemporaries by no means limited themselves to these. One periodical in 1830, for example, devoted an article to the "Effects of Fright." In illustrating the case, the author assured his readers that he had never heard of "any thing so truly horrible as the following." The occasion was a nurse-maid dressing up to frighten her young charge, so as to get him to sleep. Instead, the child had become "horror-struck, and appeared to its mother with eyes fixed, in an idiotic stare, upon the image." Attempts to rouse him only uncovered that "it was a lifeless corpse."[7] Furthermore, the denomination of "horror" did not need to be limited to an individual's actions or disposition. One New York newspaper recalled the "horrors of a siege" of St. Sebastian in 1813 as "a scene sufficient to blanch the hair, and to wither the heart."[8] The idea of horror was also deployed along religious lines. One finds this in missionary narratives, for example. One missionary in 1844 observed that, during his time in India, it was not only the "divine origins" and "undeniable truth of Christianity," but also the "horrors of damnation—the terrors of everlasting misery, to which all careless sinners are exposed—that have forced me to cling to Christ as my only savior."[9]

In the early nineteenth century, the dialogue on horror invoked several related concepts. Thus, invocations of "horror" and "horrid" were frequently accompanied by terms such as "morbid," "monster," "monster in human

form," "brute," "beast," and related language. Morbid, referring to sensations that the horrific events aroused in the viewer, or should arouse in those with appropriately gauged sensibilities. Monster, labeling the perpetrator of horrific acts as fundamentally non-human. Such monsters did not have normal human thought patterns or feelings, or else they would not have committed such deeds. Furthermore, as something other than human, monsters and their motivations were unknowable. Brutal, often used as a loose synonym for "monster," to indicate the "brute" or "beast" like quality of both the horrific acts and their perpetrators.

Returning to Walt Whitman's engagements with the 1840s murders by Henry Wyatt and William Freeman, one finds that in his initial encounters with these cases, Whitman described them in the (by then) standard rhetoric of horror. In an 1845 article entitled "Horrible Murder," Whitman described how, as a convict in the Auburn Penitentiary, Wyatt engaged in the "cold-blooded murder" of his fellow inmate Thomas Gordon. The atrocity of the deed was compounded by the fact that Wyatt committed the deed just as "the convicts were returning to their cells from the chapel."[10] So, too, did Whitman describe the actions by Freeman in the language of horror, recounting how he ended up "destroying the lives of four persons, with savage ferocity and cruelty, and endangering that of the fifth."[11] In relating the "Further Particulars of the Butchery at Auburn," he relayed how the "brutal creature had a knife made on purpose to perform the bloody work!" Whitman's article opined that "a more monstrous murder has never happened in this country."[12] Before turning to some of the broader uses (by Whitman and others) of the rhetoric of horror, it is important to underscore that the same individual could move between multiple registers of this genre.

Oppositional Horror

If the shift to the new style of criminal narratives supported a conventional understanding of moral judgment, the trope of horror could be deployed in alternative ways as well. In particular, contemporaries utilized the rhetoric of horror to critique social practices that they found objectionable. Two of the most common veins of criticism employing the language of horror were the movements to end slavery and to curb excessive consumption of alcohol. That said, activists in a wide range of endeavors were not shy about using this emerging set of ideas and images to further their causes. Additionally, as the writings of Whitman illustrate, contemporaries could shift easily among different uses of "horror," using it in a straightforward manner one day, and in an oppositional manner the next.

Antislavery advocates were among the first to cast their cause along the lines of the horror genre. As early as 1826, for example, the *National Philanthropist* decried the "Horrors of the Slave Trade," focusing on the brutal conditions of the trans-Atlantic commerce itself. The editors described how three hundred slaves were put on board a vessel on the African coast, but

"owing to the shortness of provisions," one hundred died before they reached New York." Of those who survived, they could barely walk, and "all their ribs and other bones could be counted."[13] Whitman was also a frequent voice decrying the slave trade, calling for Americans not to be "engaged in this monstrous business!" He labeled it as a stain "on our boasted humanity," desensitizing participants by exposure to the "horrors we have been describing" to the point where they took on some of the monstrous qualities that society claimed to abhor.[14]

As historians have long observed, antebellum social reform movements frequently relied on highlighting the suffering of individuals—be they the insane, uneducated, or enslaved—as a means of promoting sympathy for the members of the cohort they were attempting to help.[15] If this sentimentalism became a part of the motivational structure of reforms generally, it was central to oppositional horror in particular. One reform-oriented memoir, for example, recounted an event in Burlington, New York in 1805, wherein a man had "whipped a child to death." The narrator conveyed how, "Compassion for the little innocent sufferer, sympathy for the bereaved and distressed mother, enkindled an equal horror and resentment against the unfeeling, barbarous monster who could perpetrate so foul and awful a deed!"[16] The fascination with horrific scenes in the early nineteenth century became so prevalent that one historian has labeled the phenomenon the "pornography of pain."[17] This would continue into the twentieth century, with what some identified as "delicious horrors."[18]

Certainly this focus on the pain and suffering of others was pivotal in the anti-corporal punishment movement, which looked to ban such practices in schools, prisons, asylums, and at sea.[19] At one point in the narrative of Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, a sailor is flogged merely for "interference—for asking questions." The ship's captain delivered the blows with his own hands, and when the victim called out, "Oh, Jesus Christ!", the captain advised the sailor that even such a divine figure could not render assistance—only he, the captain could. The narrator finds that, "At these words, which I shall never forget, my blood ran cold." He turned away from the scene, "Disgusted, sick, and horror-struck."[20] Whitman's *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* also took up this cause, urging that, "The brutal treatment of American seamen by the masters of some of our ships out of this port demands the especial attention of our government."[21]

Overall, the term "horror" might be applied to any action, episode, or state of affairs that a person did not approve of. Some uses, though serious, stretched the meaning of the term beyond its earlier intentions—or, at the very least, switched it to the mental realm. In this instance, it was a case of "a young man under inflexible conviction of the certainty that the *devil* would carry him off, body and soul both, on the following night." This, the author writes, was "one of the most *heart rending*, *horrible portraitures* of the inexpressibly awful consequences of diabolical mental illusion that we have ever seen." That the situation was so extreme as to be inexpressible follows exactly the pattern that

contemporaries used to describe particularly violent murders. The writer assures the audience that this depiction is to be relied upon, since "we saw in reality with our *own eyes*, and heard with our *own ears*." This situation was brought about by a "super-pious" father, who sought to make his children afraid of the devil, with no real cause, since they were already quite pious themselves.[22]

Contemporaries applied the rhetoric of horror to other aspects of spiritual experience. The early nineteenth century witnessed both a tremendous growth in evangelical activity and fierce fights among denominations for (to use a more modern term) "market share." It is not surprising then to find that in these struggles against disbelief and sin, and against alternate modes of Christianity, that a rhetoric meant to move audiences to action would play a role. An Episcopalian periodical decried the "Horrors of Atheism," while the renowned evangelical Alexander Campbell promoted missionary activity by underscoring the "Horrors of Heathenism." For the recently created denomination of Universalism, which believed in universal salvation of all mankind, the Calvinist doctrines of innate sin and the predestination of some to not find salvation and so be condemned to an eternity in Hell were central targets. Thus one finds one Universalist publication expanded upon the "Horrors of Calvinism" for its readers.[23]

The temperance movement in America took off during the 1820s, with a renewal during the 1840s, and was especially fond of invocations of "horror." In an article on the "Horror of the New Era," the author reviewed the awful clasp of spirits, and the "terrors of the delirium tremens."[24] Temperance advocates used the term "the horrors" specifically to describe the experience of withdrawing from alcohol. One article framed itself as an answer to a query about this experience: "You have asked me to describe those distressing feelings known to intemperate persons by the name of Horrors. I have labored under them myself, but how to describe them I know not." So, here one sees the same impossibility of explanation as with crime. In this case, the author asked his readers, "if you who have happily been preserved from an experimental knowledge of the Horrors, can by any stretch of imagination bring this dreadful picture to your view"?[25] So, even though temperance reformers turned the terminology of "horror" to ends rather removed from murder and monsters, their usage remained within a sincere vein.

Ironic Horror

In addition to genuine sense of shockingly violent atrocity and the utilitarian use of "horror" to elicit support for social causes, contemporaries also found that they could put the rhetoric of horror to use in a variety of other ways. Irony was one of the most common forms of this. Although it frequently supported an oppositional approach, ironic deployments of the horror genre stand apart as a separate mode from the more earnest pleas to stop the slave trade or abolish corporal punishment. That contemporaries

employed irony (and sometimes outright sarcasm) when debating the true meaning of horror underscores the extent to which the concept was already in flux—and shaped by its context—even in the era that is often identified as its seedbed.

Along with the other uses already surveyed, the trope of horror entered into the realm of politics as well. Furthermore, political uses, broadly conceived, were common sites of irony, and often sarcasm. One newspaper beseeched its readers:

> We particularly request our readers—all at least who do not hold in sufficient horror the abominable doctrine of repudiation, if such there are—to peruse attentively the admirable speech of Governor Seward, delivered at the Croton celebration.[26]

The terminology of "monster" could, of course, be used hyperbolically, especially in the political. Such was the case when one newspaper attacked New York's Secretary Young for his proposal to repudiate state government bonds, labeling him a "moral monster."[27]

One publication that frequently invoked horror in an ironic way to achieve political ends was *The Experiment and Office-Holder's Journal*. This Boston-based anti-Jackson periodical took an overall ironic stance, representing itself as staunchly pro-Jackson, and then filling its pages with absurd parodies of Jacksonian positions and policies. Such was the case in 1834 with the article "Hail Horrors! Hail!!," the title of which was a line purloined from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, from the point in the poem when Satan finds himself ejected from heaven, and deposited in the netherworld. In the newspaper article, the editor claims to "learn with horror and astonishment" that the U.S. Bank will, with its "immense power," influence Congress to pass legislation to levy a fee on every Irishman, thereby excluding many of "the best part of our population" from the ballot box. Published at a time when anti-Irish sentiment was mounting, this article lampooned Andrew Jackson's dependency on recent immigrants for a significant part of his electoral success. The article closed by calling on the government (meaning Jackson, in this case) to use the veto to "prevent this unhallowed attempt of the horrid monster."[28]

Whitman's use of the rhetoric of horror in the cases of Wyatt and Freeman was simultaneously addressed to contemporary political debates and social reform movements. Most specifically, he was part of a national dialogue on whether capital punishment should be abolished. This debate over the death penalty was particularly fervent in New York during the 1830s and 1840s.[29] Whitman used the pages of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* to forward his views against capital punishment. In 1846 Whitman wrote a long article responding to an inquiry as to whether there was a "connection between the anti-hanging movement and the late increase, in many parts of the country, of the most appalling crimes." The person writing to him proposed that growing

"aversion to severe punishment" was generating a "confidence felt by vicious men that they could not be convicted." On this account, then, the horrors of murder arose out of the social reform endeavors of anti-capital punishment advocates. Whitman acknowledged the possibility of such a trend, but reversed the attribution of blame, asking, "*But whose fault is this*?"[30]

Specifically, Whitman argued that by failing to abolish the death penalty, New York created a situation wherein juries were reluctant to return convictions in all but the most extreme cases, because they could not countenance sending the defendant to the gallows. As a result, many of "the worst doers of wickedness are thus thrown back upon society, again to commit crime, and again to be brought before the tribunals." Such a process created precisely the kind of monster that contemporaries spent so much time excoriating. Over time, "every successive plunge in the tide of iniquity making their conscience harder and more calloused." If there were some intermediate form of punishment, Whitman and other anti-capital punishment advocates argued, then there would be a way to break this cycle.

Whitman felt justified in his stance on capital punishment when the Freeman attack on the Van Nest home took place, for it seemed to embody everything that he thought was wrong with the present system:

> If ever the present system of criminal law, and the treatment of criminals, offered an instance of one of its fruits, that instance is the precocious monster *Freeman*, the butcher of five human beings last week in Cayuga County in this state.[31]

His article "Hurrah for Hanging" shifted into biting sarcasm, proclaiming that the "present excited state of public feeling will, of course, lead the representatives of society in due time to paddle in his blood, as he in that of his victims." In Whitman's view, capital punishment made monsters of all involved, even as they claimed to be working to rid the world of such horrors.[32]

However unfortunate the situation in Cayuga County might be, Whitman hoped "to draw as profitable a lesson as we may from the whole case." Freeman was "an uneducated, friendless outcast…never lived within any fixed moral or religious influences." Circumstances created him, then, in "the most blindly brutal cast—a mere human animal." Freeman's brutal and bestial status was in line with the "horror" narrative of attackers, but with a greater emphasis on the role of environment. Also, Whitman was among those humanitarian reformers who believed that, even in adulthood, individuals could be changed. The reforming institution to which Freeman was sent, however, did not do its work. Left in prison, with little intervention on the part of the state, Freeman brooded over his wrongful conviction. Ultimately, then, the "neglected wretch was left to his fate, left to be haunted by his foul passions." In the struggle between the human/moral and animal/passion parts of Freeman, Whitman asked, "Is it strange that the wild beast prevailed?"[33]

In describing the case, Whitman underscored how Freeman did not even know his victims, nor have any "possible hatred or ill feeling." Indeed, "This very horror of the butchery, shows how thoroughly diseased and confused the whole moral being of the murderer had become." The extremity of the slaughter, and the lack of any explanation for it, might indeed be some form of monstrosity, but of a sort that indicated mental disease, not moral degradation. Still, Whitman concluded, the likely outcome was known to all: "What remains then? *Hang him!* In the work of death, let the law keep up with the murderer, and see who will get the victory at last."[34]

Whitman's prediction came to pass—both Freeman and Wyatt were sentenced to the gallows. He expressed profound regret that "such horrors are but the carrying of the deliberate will of the community."[35] Shortly after Wyatt's execution, Whitman responded to an article in the *Rochester Advertiser*, wherein the editor opined of Wyatt that, "His body should have been buried like the carcass of a dog, far away from the honored dead." Whitman responded that, as horrific as was "the black passion of criminals," one could scarcely find a "blood thirstier sentiment than that which could pursue the lifeless clay of a wicked but fellow creature."[36]

Even at its earlier stages, then, horror was a contested category. While we most frequently look back on some touchstone literary embodiments of the genre of horror when we think about the early nineteenth century, a closer look at the actual historical situation reveals a far greater range of permutations of the idea of horror. Once again, then, it is clear that in order to really understand what is going on with the idea of "horror" in the early nineteenth century, we need to scrutinize the broader cultural context in which it is situated. While literary innovation can indeed lead to cultural change, cultural context often prefigures literary production. While this article has focused on the antebellum era in America, hopefully future scholarship on horror in a variety of eras and locales will employ a broader historical context, and thus give us a richer and more fulsome account of the many faces of horror.

Notes

[1] John Walker, *Walker's Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language* (New York, 1834), 192; Noah Webster, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1839), 204.

[2] Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674–1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

[3] Charles Chauncy, *The Horrid Nature, and Enormous Guilt, of Murder* (Boston, 1754), 12; emphasis in original. Chauncy articulated, as well, the declension model of sin: "Be upon your Guard against all the *Tendencies* towards this Sin, such as *Anger, Wrath, Hatred, Malice, Envy, Revenge;* together with their immediate Effects, *contumelious* and *despiteful Language, Quarrellings* and *Fightings*. If we do not keep our selves from the

governing Influence of these *Occasions* of the Sin of *Murder,* we shall live in continual Hazard of being betrayed unto it, to our *own,* as well as the Dishonour of God." (23)

[4] Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

[5] "Monstrous Villainy," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 1, 1846.

[6] "Brutal Villainy!", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 23, 1846.

[7] "Effects of Fright," *New York Mirror & Ladies' Literary Gazette*, March 13, 1830, 283.

[8] "The Horrors of a Siege," *New York Telescope*, December 5, 1829.

[9] "India within the Ganges," *The Missionary Register*, (Oct. 1844), 442.

[10] "Horrible Murder," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 20, 1845.

[11] "A Narrative to Sicken Its Readers!", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 28, 1846.

[12] "Further Particulars of the Butchery at Auburn," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 18, 1846.

[13] "Horrors of the Slave Trade," *National Philanthropist*, May 27, 1826.

[14] "Slavers—and the Slave Trade," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 18, 1846.

[15] Elizabeth B. Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in America," *Journal of American History* 82.2 (1995): 463–93; Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860.* New York: Hill & Wang, 1997 rev. ed; orig. 1978.

[16] Nathaniel Stacy, *Memoirs of the Life of Nathaniel Stacy, Preacher of the Gospel of Universal Grace* (1850), 162.

[17] Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100.2 (1995): 303–34.

[18] Kevin Rozario, "'Delicious Horrors': Mass Culture, The Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism," *American Quarterly American Quarterly* 55.3 (2003): 417–55.

[19] Mrya C. Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1984.

[20] Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1842), 127.

[21] "Brutal Treatment of Seamen," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 26, 1846.

[22] J. T. "Horrors of Intellectual Slavery," *National Library and Advocate*, November 20, 1833. Emphasis in original.

[23] "Horrors of Atheism," *Protestant Episcopalian and Church Register*, February 1, 1831, 58. Alexander Campbell, "Horrors of Heathenism," *Millennial Harbinger*, November 1834, 529–36. D. J. M., "Horrors of Calvinism," *Universalist & Ladies Repository*, September 13, 1834, 60–1.

[24] "Horrors of the New Era," *Journal of Humanity*, February 17, 1830. See also "An Experimental Description of 'The Horrors,'" [New Hampshire] *Temperance Herald*, September 1, 1834.

[25] "An Experimental Description of 'The Horrors,' in a Letter to a Friend," *Temperance Herald*, September 1, 1834.

[26] "Word for Honesty," *New York Spectator*, October 18, 1842.

[27] "Repudiation," *Skaneateles Columbian*, 13 April 1843.

[28] "Hail Horrors! Hail!!", *The Experiment and Office-Holder's Journal*, May 5, 1834.

[29] Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 117–59.

[30] "Our Answer to a Reasonable Question," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 24, 1846. Emphasis in original.
[31] "Hurrah for Hanging!", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 23, 1846
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] "Execution of Wyatt," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 25, 1846.
[36] September 9, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1846.

The Foolkiller Movie: Uncovering an Overlooked Horror Genre

Florent Christol
Paul Valéry University

On the high side of horror lie the classics: F.W Murnau's Nosferatu (1922), King Kong (1933), Dracula (1931), Frankenstein (1931), and various works by Alfred Hitchcock, Carl Theodor Dreyer […] At the very bottom, lies—horror of horrors—the slasher (or splatter or shocker) film: the immensely generative story of a psycho killer who slashers to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is himself subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived.

~Carol Clover[1]

Monstrosity actualizes the tendency of all persecutors to project the monstrous results of some calamity or public or private misfortune onto some poor unfortunate who, by being infirm or a foreigner, suggests a certain affinity to the monstrous. Instead of bearing certain faintly monstrous characteristics, the victim is hard to recognize as a victim because he is totally monstrous.

~René Girard[2]

Despite its recent recognition by (a section of) academia, a large part of horror's cultural production (be it gothic, splatter, rape-and-revenge, torture-porn or any other sub-category) remains, by and large, outside the realm of "respectability." Like other "lowbrow" popular cultural artifacts, horror books or films—however they are defined or theorized—are still considered by many critics to be "grotesque," para-cultural objects, not "serious" enough to constitute a legitimate field of study. The slasher film is a good case in point, as Carol Clover's quote heading this article makes clear. Replete with graphic scenes depicting the murder of sexually uninhibited teenagers, films such as the *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* series were extremely popular among teenagers and young adults in the early 1980s.[3] Although its perception has slightly improved over the years and that, with the success of *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), it has reached mainstream status, the slasher film was for a long time perceived in an

extremely negative light by highbrow critics, parents, and "moral" authorities. As it seemed to foreground an equation between sex and death and that "a basic slasher film premise was a male killer stalking and slaughtering a bevy of young and attractive female victims,"[4] the genre has traditionally been apprehended as a symbolical backlash after the progressive social changes brought about by the sixties (sexual liberation among other things), as well as a radical expression of sadism and misogyny. Here is, for instance, what a film critic had to say about the genre in a review published in *Spokesman-Review* in 1981:

> In films like (…) *My Bloody Valentine*, *Prom Night*, *Silent Scream*, *Friday the 13th* and *Terror Train*, the basic pattern always holds. Young, sometimes innocent teens get together to party or just share a little free spirit. Along comes the bogey man, and in his/her hands there's a knife, ax or other means of mutilation. (…) By film's end the bad guy always gets his, but by that time survivors are outnumbered by the hacked-up, impaled, garroted, mutilated, decapitated and dismembered victims.[5]

According to this widely accepted view, Michael Myers or Jason Voorhees, the two emblematic and seemingly indestructible killers from the *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* series, are the vehicle of punitive, Old Testament morals, embodying within the fiction the conservative ideology expounded by "Reaganite" entertainments and politics popular at the time.[6]

In this paper, I wish to reconsider the way the slasher genre has been theorized. I believe that, by electing *Halloween* as the generic template and by mostly focusing on the psycho-sexual dynamics at play in the films, film critics have partly mystified the genre. I want to bring to the fore other narrative elements that can help us construct another genealogy for the slasher film. I will contend that the slasher can be apprehended, not so much as a genre than as a branching off from an overlooked genre revolving around the scenario of the vengeance of a bullied and humiliated "fool" *à la Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976). It is only through the course of time that this initially innocent scapegoat turned into an invincible psycho-killer figure, in a process of demonization hinted at by the second quote heading this essay. My goal here is to attempt a first description, definition, and delimitation of this horror genre and chart its evolution through time.

Demystifying the Slasher Genre

As I have written above, one of the prevailing ideas regarding the slasher film is that it features psychotic killers punishing sexually promiscuous teenagers or "psychosexually disturbed male sadists torturing and murdering scores of beautiful, independent young women."[7] The problem is that this reading, which informs numerous studies on the genre,[8] stands on shaky

ground. Indeed, many slasher film villains are not sexually repressed psychopaths but physically and psychologically weak individuals subjected to mockery from their peers or hierarchical superiors, or facing the irresponsible behavior of "practical jokers." Following a particularly traumatizing incident of hazing or bullying, these victims (or surrogates) decide to avenge themselves by killing their bullies in a series of spectacular murder set-pieces. As Adam Rockoff observes,

> There is a prevailing misconception, […] that the killer in slasher films is always a supernatural boogeyman who wears a battered hockey mask and wields a machete. However, in the majority of slasher films, the killer is an ordinary person who has suffered some terrible—and sometimes not so terrible—trauma (humiliation, the death of a loved one, rape, psychological abuse). It is because of this past injustice that he (or in few cases, she) seeks vengeance—and the bloodier the better. […] Slasher films often begin with a prologue which takes place years before the events in the film. In it, the killer either witnesses a traumatic event, usually to a family member (*Friday the 13th*, *Prom Night*, *Happy Birthday to Me*, *My Bloody Valentine*), or is the victim of a devastating, humiliating or harmful accident, prank or tragedy (*The Burning*, *Terror Train*). On the anniversary of this horrible event, usually designated by a holiday or traditional celebration (Christmas, New Year's Eve, Thanksgiving, April Fool's Day, birthday, graduation, prom), the killer returns to the scene to claim his revenge. […] During the rest of the film, the killer sets out to punish the guilty. This may include the ones directly responsible for his misery (*Terror Train*), a symbolic representation (*Friday the 13th*), those related to the guilty (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*) or any person unlucky enough to get in his way (*Halloween*).[9]

Examples of this narrative pattern abound in what we could call "motivated slashers": In *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), Pamela Voorhees kills the teenagers who, in her mind, stand for the people responsible for the death of her mentally disabled and physically deformed son, Jason. In *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch, 1980), a young man avenges the death of his sister killed because of child's play gone wrong. He hunts down the irresponsible bullies years later, during the night of the high-school prom. In *The Burning* (Tony Maylam, 1981), Cropsy, a summer camp janitor victim of a cruel prank pulled by practical jokers that leaves him burnt and disfigured, comes back several years later on the location of the "accident" to execute the original persecutors. In *The House on Sorority Row* (Mark Rosman, 1983), the killer avenges the death of his mother, accidentally killed following a practical joke pulled by immature students. In *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983), a

young girl (or is she?) goes on a killing spree to get back at the bullies who tormented her in a summer camp. In *Killer Party* (William Fruet, 1986) and *Pledge Night* (Paul Ziller, 1990), a college student killed in a hazing ritual comes back from the grave to execute irresponsible pranksters who behave in a way likely to reproduce the original accident.

When brought to the fore, this plot element radically alters the way these films can be apprehended. First, it humanizes a figure that has been too easily dismissed as "insane," "inherently violent," "sadistic," "misogynistic," etc., and it enables viewers to conceptualize his murderous acts as a form of answer to a pre-existing and seemingly endemic social violence.[10] More importantly, it opens up the possibility for a new film genre to be apprehended and, eventually, for a new cultural frame to be theorized that, I believe, can account for the complexity and interrelation of multiple horror films and burlesque or "gross-out" comedies.[11] Indeed, this "revenge of the nerd" (or a victim humiliated or killed by foolish acts) scenario also runs, but in a more overt way, through a series of horror films never officially charted onto the map of American cinema, many of which pre-date the official birth of the slasher film in 1978 with *Halloween*: *Willard* (Daniel Mann, 1971), *Horror High* (Larry Stouffer, 1974), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), *Kiss of the Tarantula* (Chris Munger, 1976), *Massacre at Central High* (René Daalder, 1976), *Sisters of Death* (Joseph Mazzuca, 1977), *Jennifer* (Brice Mack, 1978), *Fade to Black* (Vernon Zimmerman, 1980), *Christmas Evil* (Lewis Jackson, 1981), *Evilspeak* (Eric Weston, 1981), *Christine* (John Carpenter, 1983), *Trick or Treat* (Charles Martin Smith, 1986) or *976–EVIl* (Robert Englund, 1988), to name but a few, all feature this scenario. In a more comical vein, *Revenge of the Nerds* (Jeff Kanew, 1984), *The Toxic Avenger* (Michael Herz, 1985), and *Funland* (Michael A. Simpson, 1987) provide burlesque variations on the same script.[12]

As opposed to the slasher films, which are mainly shot from the point of view of the "practical jokers/bullies" (a group usually including the Final Girl[13]), and relegate the killer in the off-screen space until he comes face to face with the Final Girl in the final reel, these films are mainly shot from the point of view of the victim/murderous avenger who is the main focus of the narrative and with whom the viewer is encouraged to identify. But this formal difference, however significant, should not deter us from acknowledging that in both cases the storyline is the same. In this light, the slasher film as it has been traditionally theorized appears to be not so much a new genre than a "syntaxic reorganization of semantic elements" (in the terms of Rick Altman[14]), that is, a formal inflexion of a pre-existing genre that continued to co-exist in parallel with the slasher.

The Foolkiller and His Attributes

In this film genre, that I will officially baptize shortly hereafter, the killer comes most of the time from a poor/working-class social background: Willard works in a small office for a metal foundry factory and his main antagonist is

his tyrannical boss (Ernest Borgnine); Carrie lives in a dilapidated house in the American gothic style and cannot afford new clothes; Jennifer is a poor girl bullied by wealthy mean girls in an upper-class girls private school; Pamela Voorhees works as the cook in a summer camp; Cropsy, the camp janitor in *The Burning*, is shown living in a shabby cabin, wearing dirty work clothes, etc. The conflict opposing the victim/killer to the bullies or practical jokers is therefore, among other things, defined in relation to class.

The killer is also distinguished by a peculiar physical appearance: he usually suffers from a physical disability or deformity.[15] In order to fight against his bullies, Vernon Potts in *Horror High* makes a potion turning him into a limping monster. In the same way, David, victimized by sadistic bullies in *Massacre at Central High*, has a leg crushed by a car that he is repairing and also starts to limp. His athletic body (he is shown jogging in several scenes) is turned into a crippled body. In *The Redeemer: Son of Satan!* (Constantine S. Gochis, 1978), a killer with a limp uses clownish mannequins to execute people that persecuted vulnerable students in high school. In *The Burning*, Cropsy's face and body are totally burnt following a practical joke that "goes wrong." Likewise, in *Phantom of the Paradise*, Winslow Leach has his face disfigured following an accident. Other characters present birth defects, such as Jason Voorhees or the killer of *The House on Sorority Row*, who have a bald, hypertrophied skull. Structurally speaking, the killer's idiosyncratic physical features are opposed to the powerful and muscled "hard-bodies" of those who mock him and embody the "ideal" norm from the point of view of the dominant American ideology.[16]

With his lowly social status and a-typical, disabled, under-developed body, the "grotesque" victim/murderer of this horror sub-genre belongs to the socio-cultural category of the "fool," a term obviously ripe with negative or derogatory associations but that I employ here as referring to a classical cultural type found in abundance in folklore, literature, and drama. The fool represents a collective concept of a kind of person distinguished from the normal group member by a deviation in person or conduct that is regarded as ludicrous, improper, and inferior. He is usually defined as a person lacking in judgment, psychologically closer to the child than to the adult (the fool may be simple-minded, like the Marx Brothers' Pippo), who behaves absurdly or stupidly (when he is not totally devoid of reason), and encompassing a broad range of characters, including both the village idiot and the harmless eccentric. The fool possesses grotesque, ridiculous looks, and is often physically deformed (the fool's characteristics frequently overlap with those of the "freak").[17] According to sociologist Orrin Klapp,

> The antics of the fool, his ugliness, gracelessness, senselessness, or possible deformity of body represent departures from corresponding group norms of propriety. The fool is the antithesis of decorum, beauty, grace, intelligence, strength, and other virtues embodied in heroes; and, therefore, as a type is antiheroic.[18]

Because of this difference from the norm and his (and sometimes her) physical weakness, which prevents or discourages him from retaliating, the fool often incites mockery or the hostility of the social group to which he belongs, and constitutes henceforth an "ideal" scapegoat.[19]

In the case of the films under scrutiny here, the character of the killer is a "fool" in at least three senses: he is a "meek" individual who is easily exploited; he possesses an idiosyncratic appearance; and his physical "weakness" makes him a convenient target recipient of group derision and abuse. However, in these films, the victim escapes from his socially assigned fool role by getting back at his bullies, thereby restoring (or trying to restore) a form of (retributive) justice and order. In that aspect, the films constitute a striking departure from the role traditionally prescribed to the fool.

As the main character of these films is a "fool" but also a killer of "fools" (in the looser and more moralistic sense of socially and irresponsible people acting in a foolish way), I propose calling this character the "Foolkiller" and provisionally naming the genre he evolves in the "Foolkiller" movie.[20]

From Foolkiller to Clown Killer: A Theory of Modes

Taking a step back, it is possible to locate (at least) two distinct (but overlapping) phases in the Foolkiller film genre, which correspond to two modes or ways to tell the story. In the first phase of the Foolkiller movie (from *Willard* in 1971 to *Carrie* in 1976), the viewer is meant to identify and empathize with the fool. This phase could be seen as a very concentrated expression of what Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye calls the "ironic mode," a mode interested in the trial of the everyday man, which emphasizes the innocent victim's suffering and status as scapegoat:

> Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be. [...] Thus the figure of a typical or random victim begins to crystallize in domestic tragedy as it deepens in ironic mode. We may call this typical victim the *pharmakos* or scapegoat. [...] The archetype of the incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society.[21]

The "ironic" Foolkiller films increase the viewer's empathy for the victim, notably by dedicating several scenes where the fool is relentlessly bullied. This mode thus partly exonerates the foolkiller's violence (his life is a shown to be living hell) and encourages the viewer to enjoy his retribution and symbolical revenge against embodiments of strength, power and authority, themselves depicted as abusive and dysfunctional. Carrie, for example, is conceptualized as

a victim more than a monstrous deviant creature. The fact that she kills people who "only" mocked and humiliated her seems extreme but, in the logics of the film, did she really have the choice? Her seemingly disproportionate revenge, although criminal, is given some legitimacy within the narrative in the sense that the world inhabited by these teenagers seems devoid of responsible adults or social institutions that could balance or keep the mean or abusive behaviors of the bullies (be they young or adults) in check. Carrie's final outburst of violence therefore comes as a tragic but comprehensible and logical conclusion. What's more, it is presented as an irrational and uncontrollable force, which further contributes to exonerate her:

> In De Palma's film […] Carrie is embarrassed by her teacher, insulted by her peers, mocked by her neighbor, and denied by the school's principal. Simultaneously, Carrie's response to the violence that is exerted upon her is presented as an almost unconscious impulse, through the use of her telekinetic powers. In De Palma's film, the violence comes out of her body as a burst, an unconscious eruption of power upon the school system in general, without distinction of any kind. She cannot distinguish between the ones that had tried to help her or those that always hurt her. Her gym teacher […] is punished along with the rest. In this final moment, Carrie resembles those kids who, exhausted their hopes of a better day, choose to engage in a murderous spree that make no distinction between victims.[22]

Beyond avenging his persecution, the Foolkiller executes those who have wronged or hurt one of his/her loved ones, or defenseless people victimized by bullies. Thus, Willard punishes his boss Martin after he has killed Socrates, his innocent rat, and tyrannized the frail Joan. Vernon defends Robin in *Horror High*, and Winslow protects Phoenix in *Phantom of the Paradise*. In *Massacre at Central High*, David defends the nerds bullied by the "jocks," and Melvin Ferd defends the most vulnerable people of Tromaville in *The Toxic Avenger*. Although presented as a murderer deserving punishment, the Foolkiller therefore plays an important social role normally or "ideally" taken over by social institutions (the police, family, religion): the protection of vulnerable and defenseless citizens (children, disabled or old people…) and the punishment of irresponsible ones.

Most of these "ironic Foolkiller movies" end up with the death of the victim-turned-murderous avenger: Carrie is killed by her mother, Willard by his rats, Eric (*Fade to Black*) by a sniper, etc. The Foolkiller is therefore punished for his murderous transgression, which further lends the genre a moral or ethical dimension.

The second phase of the Foolkiller movie—which is more of a branching off from the original genre, as the two modes continue coexisting side by

side—corresponds to the slasher genre (from 1978 with *Halloween* to 1984 with the release of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*).[23] As opposed to the ironic mode, the slasher genre encourages the viewer to identify, not with the victim/killer but with the "normal" teenagers that constitute the killer's targets, some of whom are either responsible for the killer's trauma or indirectly related to it. Unlike the "ironic" Foolkiller movies, the killer's victimization in the slasher film is usually recounted as back-story to the main plot, and, most of the time, briefly shown in the opening of the film or only revealed as a half-forgotten memory. During most scenes, the killer is relocated in the off-screen space and made knowable primarily by his/her point-of-view shots. While the original Foolkiller is fully humanized, the slasher Foolkiller is presented as a shadowy figure preying on American youth, "a maniac, who, as an emotionless stalker-killer, is stripped of the clearest markers of humanity, seeming thus, as several scholars recognized, at once inhuman and superhuman."[24] The films usually end with a fight between the killer, finally revealed in the open, and the Final Girl.[25]

The syntaxic reconfiguration of the story, which turns the killer into an elusive, shadowy figure, makes it almost impossible for the viewer to empathize with him and understand the reasons for his violence. The practical joke against the fool opening the films appears as a form of pretext to trigger his violence. As Adam Rockoff observes, "this explanation rarely makes the killer a more sympathetic figure, most likely because it is hardly sufficient to explain the level of psychosis these villains display."[26] Moreover, unlike the "ironic" Foolkiller movies, in which the fool becomes a sort of grotesque vigilante, the fool in the slasher films mostly targets individuals who are very indirectly related to his original trauma. His violence is therefore not conceptualized as a form of (twisted) justice but as irrational and purely criminal.

In the way it turns an originally innocent and sympathetic figure into a cold-blooded, monstrous killer, the slasher form can be characterized as a "mythic" form, in the sense that René Girard grants to this word. For Girard, taking his cues from J. G. Frazer (*The Scapegoat*) and Freud (*Totem and Taboo*), human culture originates in the lynching of a scapegoat that purges a community from reciprocal violence. Myth represents an effort (mostly unconscious) from the lynch mob to repress culturally the memory of this murderous act through the creation of a story in which the scapegoat is retroactively attributed some "evil" intentions and the lynching granted some legitimacy (in the myth, the lynch mob did not sacrifice a vulnerable scapegoat but killed a terrifying monster that threatened the social fabric). Through the making and telling of the myth, the lynch mob exonerates itself:

> …in myths, as in other cultural artefacts and institutions, humans avoid acknowledging their own violence, and especially the crucial role it has played in the genesis of culture. To accept responsibility for scapegoating would be to

> acknowledge the arbitrary, violent origins of cultural institutions and society itself. As long as humans can believe they have effectively rid themselves of their violence by attributing it to outside sources such as gods and other superhuman creatures, as happens so frequently in myths, they can continue to presume their own innocence. Since myths are invariably told from the persecutors' perspective (the victim having been eliminated and therefore having no voice), it follows that they initially justify sacrificial violence and then disguise it or erase it altogether.[27]

This demonizing dimension of the mythic process is clearly visible in the case of the *Friday the 13th* series, in which an innocent victim ends up becoming an invincible monster through the receding of the memory of his death in the viewer's mind.

The Foolkiller genre starts being inverted in the mid-1980s, with the release of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), the first film of an extremely popular series that numbers seven episodes. If the slasher film can be understood as an extension and a reconfiguration of the genre told from the view point of the "practical joker" characters, the Freddy series signals a new cultural paradigm and the end of the "Foolkiller" genre as a commercially successful venture.[28] The film's villain, Freddy Krueger, is a child killer lynched by angry-parents-turned-vigilantes after the failure of institutional justice to bring him to jail. Freddy comes back from the grave to avenge himself by murdering the children of his executioners through the dreams of his victims. Like Carrie, Cropsy (*The Burning*), or Eric (*Fade to Black*), Freddy is the victim of collective violence. Like them, he is physically grotesque (he is extremely thin and his face is totally burnt). However, unlike them, Freddy's criminality *precedes* his lynching. Freddy is not an innocent scapegoat but a sociopath "deserving" of his punishment. With his practical jokes and Rabelaisian brand of humor, he plays the function of prankster/trickster played by the bullies in the Foolkiller genre. By turning the freak/fool into a murderer threatening children and innocent people instead of protecting them, these movies totally break from the genre's original ethical dimension.[29] A film cycle (still going on today) featuring scary killer clowns[30] exploits thematic and aesthetic tropes from the "Foolkiller movie" (the motif of physical deformity, the clown costume worn by the killer, etc.) but associates them exclusively with ideas of moral depravity and evil.

An Aberrant Cultural Figure

Before concluding this article, I want to underscore that the Foolkiller is, in many ways, an aberration within American culture, where the character of the fool is very rarely associated with ideas of vengeance, crime or justice (be it under its vigilante guise).[31] Traditionally, the upholding of the law is located

within an institution or is taken up by powerful/heroic-type individuals (cowboys, vigilantes, super-heroes…) and legitimated by the Frontier myth.[32] Due to his freakish, feeble, queer, "feminine," anti-heroic physical attributes, the fool stands at the opposite pole of the ideal body constructed by the prevailing normative American ideology and is usually found in "marginal" cultural sites where his abnormal behavior serves to reinforce the norm. The "natural" home of the fool is the circus where, under the grotesque make-up of the clown, he embodies anti-social values or serves as a cathartic relief for everyday pressure[33]. In the freak show—an extremely popular institution up until the 20th century—people with "aberrant" physical features were isolated and exhibited to a paying audience, helping reaffirm what was culturally valued (beauty, health, strength, etc.) by displaying what was not.[34] Nowadays, the fool is more likely to be found on screen within generic sites that exploit him as a source of laughter (burlesque movies), pathos (melodrama) or fear (horror films), that is, genres in which his function is to serve as a scapegoat whose ritual sacrifice underscores the prevailing aesthetical, social and moral norm.[35] The Foolkiller genre, which turns the fool into a murderous vigilante constitutes, in this perspective, a form of cultural transgression, whose violence was partly "rectified" by the slasher form that turned this aberrant figure into a more traditionally recognizable figure (an evil killer whose vengeance seems disconnected from his original trauma).

Many questions remain at this stage: how can we account for the apparition of this genre and "grotesque" figure in contemporary American cinema? Why did the slasher form, which turns the tragic fool figure into a monster, overtake the original formula and become the most popular version of the story by 1978? And why did the "Foolkiller" film genre start to lose its popular appeal by the mid-1980s, with the release of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series and killer clown movies? These questions, among many others, will have to remain unanswered for now, but I hope that they will provide food for thoughts and discussion.[36]

Notes

[1] Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," in *The Dread of Difference. Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 66–113.
[2] Quoted in Joshua David Bellin, *Framing Monsters* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 1.
[3] Of course, the slasher genre has a long history. Although *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* (both 1960) have often been cited as playing an essential part in modeling the slasher film, as well as Italian *gialli* such as Mario Bava's *Twitch on the Death Nerve* (1971) and Sergio Martino's *Torso* (1973), film historians usually date the official birth of the slasher film with the release of *Halloween* in 1978. Indeed, it was Carpenter's film that gave the genre a recognizable form/pattern and became a blueprint for subsequent films. For a history of the slasher film, see Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978–1986*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2002.

[4] Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold, Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980–1989* (*History of the American Cinema, vol. 10*) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 351.
[5] The review is quoted by Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle* (London, Continuum, 2011), 20.
[6] On the notion of Reaganite entertainment and the conservative ideology they supposedly carry over, see Andrew Britton, "Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment," in *Britton on Film: The Complete Film Criticism of Andrew Britton*, ed. B. Keith Grant (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), and Robin Wood, *Hollywood, from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
[7] Nowell, *Blood Money*, 18.
[8] See, for instance, Andrew Tudor's *Monsters and Mad Scientists. A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), or Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws. Gender in the Modern Horror Film.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
[9] Rockoff, *Going to Pieces*, 5–13. It is fair to acknowledge that Vera Dika was the first scholar to notice this pattern in her structuralist study on the genre: "The stalker-film is always presented as a two-part structure. The first part presents an event occurring years earlier. In it, the killer is either driven to madness or is already mad because of an extreme trauma. This trauma is caused by his viewing of, his knowledge of, or his participation in a wrongful action perpetrated by one or more members of a young community. Because of this event, the killer experiences a loss. The killer responds with rage, sometimes expressed immediately in an act of vengeance or sometimes withheld until the second segment of the film. In this second, or modern-day, section, the killer returns to take vengeance on the guilty parties or on their symbolic substitutes." *Games of Terror*, *Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 59.
[10] "Violence" is a term that could seem excessive here as the bullying endured by the victim is, in real life, either disregarded by authorities, or considered as a normal rite of passage for teenagers, or as a natural behavior of children/teenagers without adult supervision (when it is not socially valued, as it was during the Reagan era, which favored the strong over the weak). William Rothman notes, however, the impossibility to actually disentangle the relationship between practical jokes, bullying, and violence: "As Freud recognized, there can be violence in the most apparently innocent of actions. One might object that the violence in a joke or a slip of the tongue is merely symbolic, not real, violence. As Freud also recognized, however, a clear boundary between real and symbolic violence is difficult or impossible to draw. "Real" violence can have symbolic meaning, and "symbolic" violence can have real consequences." William Rothman, "Violence in Film," in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. David Slocum (London: Routledge, 2001), 40.
[11] By doing so, I am following on the lead of William Paul, who pleads for the opening of cumbersome generic frames in his wonderful book on "gross out movies," *Laughing Screaming, Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, and of Jack Morgan which offers a fruitful discussion on the links between comedy and horror in *The Biology of Horror. Gothic Literature and Film*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002. However, even Paul, who comes closest to uncovering the genre I am trying to chart here, does not study *Carrie* and *Revenge of the*

Nerds in the same chapter, supposedly because one is a horror film while the other is a comedy.

[12] In *Revenge of the Nerds*, the nerds do not go so far as to actually murder their bullies, but their violence could verge on the criminal if the comical generic layer of the film did not prevent it. For a more complete list of films featuring this plot, see my article "La violence du *slasher film*: une affaire de morale," *Darkness* 15 (Sin'Art, Besançon (2014): 18–33.

[13] Film scholar Carol Clover theorized the Final Girl figure in a book that has become an important reference in horror scholarship (*Men, Women and Chainsaws*). Unlike her friends, who spend most of their time having fun, the Final Girl is characterized by her seriousness, but also by her determination and her courage. One of the only people to survive the massacre, she battles the killer in the climax of the film.

[14] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing, 1999.

[15] Although I will not develop this motif here, it is worth noting that the killer is also distinguished by his frequent wearing of grotesque masques and disguises. For a development on this topic, see my article "The Killer's Costume in the American Slasher Film and the Cultural Myth of the Foolkiller," in *Dressed to Kill: Fashionable Horror in Film and Literature*, ed. G. Whitehead and J. Petrov (Bloomsbury; forthcoming).

[16] See Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies. Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994, and *Extraordinary Bodies, Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University, 1997.

[17] "The person who hobbles, limps, or is physically awkward more easily acquires this role. The deformed fool deviates in appearance from group norms of beauty, stature, posture, health, etc. He may be ugly, dwarfed, crippled, gigantic, animal-like, or subhuman in appearance. Deformity has the symbolic capacity to suggest various inappropriate roles of the fool." William Orrin Klapp, "The Fool as a Social Type," *American Journal of Sociology* 55.2 (1949): 158.

[18] Klapp, "The Fool as Social Type," 158.

[19] On the physical criteria of a "good" scapegoat, see René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

[20] Elsewhere, I officially baptize this genre the "Hop-Frog movie" as I argue that it can be taken to be a sort of contemporary retelling of a story originally formulated by Edgar Allan Poe in his short-story "Hop-Frog" (1849), in which a crippled court-jester violently punishes a tyrannical king after a particularly humiliating practical joke (see Christol, "La violence du *slasher film*," 18–33.)

[21] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 43.

[22] Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns, Mariana Zarate, and Canela Ailen Rodriguez Fontao, "It Gets Better (When You Come Back from the Grave and Kill Them All): *Bullying and the Horror Film and the Indeterminacy of the Monster*," in *Bullying in Popular Culture*, ed. Abigail G. Scheg (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 136–137.

[23] From afar, *Halloween*, considered by most film historians to be the first "official" slasher film, seems to be foreign to the generic dynamic studied here (Michael Myers is not to be directly victimized). However, I think that it also belongs to the "Foolkiller" genre. Indeed, Michael performs the function of Foolkiller played by the avenging victims in the "Foolkiller" movies. At the beginning of the film, Michael murders his irresponsible sister who prefers making out with her boyfriend than watching over her

vulnerable younger brother. Michael also watches over Tommy Lloyd, a child bullied by his school pals; see Christol, "Etait-ce bien le croquemitaine? Pour une démystification d'*Halloween*," in *CinémAction*, *Les cinémas de l'horreur*, ed. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris (Paris: Corlet, 2010), 105–111.
[24] Nowell, *Blood Money*, 23.
[25] As Vera Dika writes, "unlike the heroine, the killer remains out of sight, hidden from us and from the rest of the film's characters. He may be hidden, by the frameline or behind trees, curtains, doorways, or may even be in a physical disguise. When the killer is finally revealed, we find him to be grotesque, either physically or mentally, and sometimes both. [...] he has been distorted by time and anguish into a driving deadly force." Dika, *Games of Terror*, 55.
[26] Rockoff, *Going to Pieces*, 13.
[27] Richard J. Golsan, *René Girard and Myth, an Introduction* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 68.
[28] Since the mid-1990s, this plot has resurfaced in movies such as *Mathilda* (Danny DeVito, 1996*)*, *The Craft* (Andrew Fleming, 1996), *Bruiser* (George Romero, 2000), *Valentine* (Jamie Blanks, 2001), *Tamara* (Jeremy Haft, 2005), *Drive Thru* (Brendan Cowles, 2007), *Truth or Die* (Robert Heath, 2007), *Stitches* (Conor McMahon, 2012), *The Final* (Joey Stewart, 2010), as well as the *Masters of Horror* episode, *We All Scream for Ice Cream* (Tom Holland, 2007). I believe that this resurgence can be understood in the light of heavily mediated school shootings, especially the Columbine massacre (April 1999), in which two bullied outcasts took revenge on their tormentors, thereby proposing a real, modern-day take on the cultural script provided by the Foolkiller *mythos*.
[29] By the end of the 1980s, traces of the *Foolkiller* movie genre are still visible in kid-oriented movies in which "little monsters," animals or supernatural helpers come to the rescue of bullied and/or physically disabled, vulnerable children such as *The Garbage Pail Kids Movie* (Rod Amateau, 1987), *The Heavenly Kid* (Cary Medoway, 1987), *Cameron's Closet* (Armand Mastroianni, 1988), *The Invisible Kid* (Avery Crounse, 1988), *Mac and Me* (Stewart Raffill, 1988), *Little Monsters* (Richard Greenberg, 1989), *The Willies* (Brian Peck, 1990), or *Munchie* (Jim Wynorski, 1992). In these films, the Foolkiller is split into two distinct figures: a figure of "childish" innocence, and a figure functioning as a parental substitute and as a guardian angel/protector/agent of violence against the bullies.
[30] For example, *It* (Tommy Lee Wallace, 1984), *Blood Harvest* (Bill Rebane, 1987), *Out of Order* (Michael Shroeder, 1988), *Clownhouse* (Victor Salva, 1989), etc.
[31] The example of *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1931), a film which surely comes to mind here, only underscores my argument. Indeed, the film, which I apprehend as the first filmic take on the Foolkiller *mythos*, failed at the box-office. It became a cult film in the U.S much later, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Foolkiller movies "officially" appeared.
[32] See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, *The Mythology of the American Frontier*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.
[33] For an exploration of the clown figure in American culture, see Janet Davis, *The Circus Age. Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

[34] On the ideological and cultural function of the freak show, see Rosemary Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary* Bodies, and Leonard Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
[35] See Martin Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation. A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994, and Joshua David Bellin, *Framing Monsters* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 173.
[36] The interested reader will find some hypothetical answers in my article (Christol, "La violence du slasher film"), "The Killer's Costume in the American Slasher Film," and a forthcoming book to be published by RougeProfond (Aix-en-Provence, France), tentatively titled *Politics of the Grotesque Body: Carnival and the American Horror Film*.

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Dual Images of the "Monstrous Feminine" in *Single White Female* (1992)

Erica Tortolani
University of Massachusetts Amherst

As the horror genre of film has increased in commercial and critical success over the years, it has, nevertheless, not shied away from controversy. Oftentimes cited for its exploitation of sex and extreme violence, horror films have battled heavy criticism from nearly every portion of American society, and arguably have risen in popularity due to their taboo nature. Significantly, while the horror genre gained both positive and negative notoriety amongst audiences, so too has its popularity risen in the academic sector—in film criticism and theory. Beginning in the 1980s, horror films have been a common source of inspiration for scholars, and although it has been the subject of contention, the horror genre has proven to be a viable option for serious scholarship. Horror films have become more than merely cheap forms of entertainment; they have seamlessly integrated into numerous theories surrounding narrative, spectatorship, race, and gender, to name a few.

Feminist theory, an integral area of scholarship within film studies, has given particular attention to the horror film: representation of female characters is a hot-button issue amongst scholars, who have utilized psychoanalytic and semiotic paradigms as the basis for studying the objectified, repressed image of woman[1] in this genre.[2] It is from this point that my analysis takes shape: as an extension of Barbara Creed's research of horror in works including *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, my work locates the concept of the "monstrous feminine" in Barbet Schroeder's 1992 film *Single White Female*. However, my analysis of *Single White Female* deviates slightly from Creed's extensive study of the genre. Whereas Creed examines the representation of singular female characters in horror films to develop her categorization of the "monstrous feminine," as well as tropes including the castrating woman (or *femme castratrice*) and *vagina dentata*, I am exploring how dual or doubled images of woman complicate representations of monstrosity.

In choosing a film where two leading characters are female, I am exploring multiple representations of woman confined within one filmic environment, looking at how they are constructed in relation to one another and ultimately if, and how, they conform to characteristics of the "monstrous feminine." This, in effect, leads to a more thorough investigation of female representation in horror as a whole, extending the work of Creed while modifying it for the evolving genre.

Single White Female, based on the John Lutz novel *SWF Seeks Same*, opened to mixed reviews from critics, who generally noted that the sexy, psychological thriller failed to deliver a sense of terror and legitimate threat presented in prior films of this ilk, particularly 1987's *Fatal Attraction*. Peter Travers's review in *The Rolling Stone*, for example, asserts that although Schroeder makes a decent effort to shape the film in the vein of thrillers from directors including Alfred Hitchcock and Roman Polanski, its "Sir Mix-a-Lot approach to moviemaking smacks less of art than commerce. Selling cheap thrills with pop psychology may earn him [Schroeder] a date-night hit, but what a comedown."[3,4]

On the other hand, many critics[5] praised the film upon its release, noting its success and overall contribution within the canon of psychological horror films. Vincent Canby's review in *The New York Times* offers that "[*Single White Female*] is smooth, entertaining, and believably sophisticated. It has far more sound psychological underpinnings than other movies of its type."[6] *Entertainment Weekly*'s Owen Gleiberman mirrors this enthusiasm for the film, proclaiming:

> Watching this clever, by-the-numbers gothic thriller about a young Manhattan [sic] and the clinging, duplicitous psycho roommate who turns her life into a nightmare, you're never in doubt that each twist is going to lock into place with the assembly-line precision that has marked such recent jacked-up thrillers as *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and *Unlawful Entry*.[7]

As Gleiberman concludes, "the cat-and-mouse structure [of the film] remains fun, and Schroeder, by letting the scenes play at a lifelike tempo, gives the actresses room to create detailed characters."[8]

The comparisons made between *Single White Female* and other domestic psychological thrillers–by both proponents and detractors of Schroeder's work–have been echoed in scholarship and analysis of the film. In particular, scholars including Barry Keith Grant have characterized it as an example of the "yuppie horror film,"[9] a subgenre of American horror representing bourgeois cultural norms and anxieties surrounding the family, economy, and material items. Emerging in the late 1980s and coming into fruition throughout the 1990s, "yuppie horror" modifies traditional horror conventions within the context of white, affluent, successful protagonists, underscoring their fears of financial and social decline. Instead of sinking into actual dark, unknown

depths, as in the traditional horror film, characters within "yuppie horror" metaphorically enter darkness, moving away from financial and social power and transitioning into nothingness, urban decay,[10] and "Otherness." In the context of some "yuppie horror films," such as *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992) and *Fatal Attraction*, this is realized through the entrance (and ultimate control) of an outsider into the sacred space of the home. Disrupting the stability of the nuclear family unit, the antagonist within "yuppie horror" (interestingly, represented by a woman in numerous cases) "[functions] as the Other, as an external, disavowed projection of something repressed or denied within the individual psyche or collective culture."[11] Much like a traditional horror movie monster, the "yuppie horror" monster wreaks havoc in the fragile structure of the patriarchal order by breaking apart the seemingly stable worlds of domesticity, economic power, and dominance within the social sphere. Threatening the obtainment of ideals within bourgeois culture, the monster within "yuppie horror films" threatens "materiality more than mortality,"[12] and in this process, actively destroys otherwise phallic signifiers of power.

As a pivotal example of "yuppie horror," *Single White Female* sheds light on the threat of urban decay within the Bourgeoisie. Featuring the relationship between up-and-coming businesswoman Allie Jones (Fonda) and her psychotic roommate Hedra "Hedy" Carlson (Jason-Leigh), the film offers a glimpse of the ways in which a social "Other" can destroy pre-prescribed notions of economic gain, power, and status, domestic ideals and, arguably, notions of beauty and femininity within patriarchal discourse. Alongside myriad other psychological thrillers,[13] *Single White Female* situates its horror elements alongside societal structures, labeling the "monstrous feminine" as an entity emerging from and existing within the social symbolic. By focusing its narrative action and horrific material through a domestic and work environment, the film presents an isolated threat to the symbolic that, if ignored, could potentially destroy society at large. Furthermore, by portraying the image of woman as "monstrous," the film explicitly communicates the "Otherness" associated with femininity within patriarchal discourse, serving as a rhetorical tool by subordinating female characters.

The opening sequence of the film sets the tone for this overt "Othering" of woman within the structure of patriarchy, paving the way for the construction of the "monstrous feminine" throughout the narrative. As the film begins, a young girl is shown applying makeup in what appears to be the bathroom of her family home; the shot slowly dollys outward, showing the girl putting lipstick and powder onto her twin sister's face. The two girls look into the camera, serving as a mirror of sorts, as the girl kisses her twin on the cheek. As the sequence cuts away, a large apartment complex is featured in the frame, with the camera panning and zooming in to capture the immense size of the building. Alongside the image of the building, two voices appear over the melodramatic score, revealed in the next shot as belonging to Allie and her fiancé Sam (Steven Weber) talking about their impending marriage. The

couple, lying in bed, embrace and look at each other fondly as they discuss the details of their apparently perfect relationship—they are happily in love and even share the desire to have the same amount of children as the "statistical norm"[14] in the United States. Their bliss, however, is short-lived, as Sam's ex-wife leaves a message on an answering machine revealing their affair to an unknowing Allie.

The various verbal and visual cues throughout this opening sequence—the girls carefully applying makeup on each other's faces, the domestic bliss of Allie and Sam—establish the very setting inherent in all so-called "yuppie horror films," one characterized by bourgeois ideals and upward movement within society. Moreover, throughout the film, the image (or, rather, very suggestion) of femininity is seen as a figure constantly violating the norms instilled within patriarchal society, therefore seen as an active, "monstrous" threat to the social order. Importantly, the "monstrous feminine" within *Single White Female* extends to Creed's notions of the *femme castratrice*, a figure whose power comes from the ability to castrate, both literally (in terms of removing the penis from passive male figures) and figuratively (as an agent of destruction within the patriarchal order). The *femme castratrice*, as an extension of "monstrous feminine," comes into play in several different aspects of the film. As it will be explored below, the notion that the inherently "Othered" figure of woman can enter the characteristically male, active realm of financial independence and power is one that is threatening at best, symbolically removing the power placed onto the image of man within the phallic order.[15]

Moreover, the motif of the mirror, extending to themes of doubling prevalent in both "yuppie horror" and the horror genre as a whole, pertains to Creed's argument surrounding the image of the threatening woman, or *femme castratrice*, within the construction of the "monstrous feminine." To put it in another way, the doubling of woman throughout *Single White Female*—whether through the actual portrayal of twins in the opening or Hedy's adoption of Allie's identity throughout the narrative—juxtaposes the *femme castratrice* alongside images of threatened, prototypical femininity, endorsing a passive image of woman while condemning more dominant versions of femininity.

Significantly, key moments of the film place Hedy as the *femme castratrice* and "monstrous feminine," whereas other moments instead align Allie with monstrosity; the film's finale, however, portrays Hedy as a character that is truly monstrous, with her psychotic behaviors manifesting into near-murderous impulses. It is clear, then, that the film presents a rather complex image of femininity, further aligning with newer conceptions of the role of woman within society emerging during this time. By positioning the image of woman within the context of a modern, growing society, *Single White Female* offers a realistic view of femininity that mirrors the types of messages conveyed about woman within patriarchal discourse of the era. As a whole, the film extends the levels of subordination placed onto woman despite apparent progress during this time period, recycling misogynistic images of femininity for modern audiences.

The Career Woman and Single White Female

The representation of the career woman in *Single White Female* arguably lends itself to notions of the *femme castratrice*, in that the character Allie Jones is as successful and independent as she is threatening, penetrating and disfiguring the generally male realm of the workforce. Overall, this aligns with Creed's discussion of castration anxiety—going against Freud's general theory that postulates that woman arouses fears due to the idea that she is castrated, Creed proposes that woman's genitals induce fear because they have the potential to castrate. On the "Little Hans" case study, where Freud lays out his theories of castration anxiety, Creed summarizes:

> While Hans feared his father might punish him for his desire to have his mother for himself, he also feared the mother might castrate him as a punishment for masturbation and/or for his erotic longings for her. Freud's theory that the father is the castrator is only a part of the story.[16]

As a result, the father figure within this scenario is not the figure of castration, with the maternal feminine being a victim of this aggression, adopting the role of castrated "Other." Rather, taking on near-phallic attributes, the woman-as-castrator utilizes her toothed vagina, or *vagina dentata*,[17] to trap and inflict harm upon unsuspecting (often-times male) victims.

As she is introduced in the beginning of the film, Allie is a talented businesswoman who develops software for fashion design distributed to prospective corporations in the city. Smart, sophisticated, and business-savvy, Allie is depicted as a well-established and respected woman in her field, a character that proves to be a formidable figure in the workforce. This is indicated in her job interview with prospective employer Mitchell Myerson (Stephen Tobolowsky)—she is able to articulate fully the logistics of her software program, is able to negotiate compensation and various business costs, and exudes a sense of cool confidence that attracts the lecherous business owner. Additionally, she is shown to be highly experienced with technology as a whole, not only coding and constructing her fashion design software, but repeatedly using the Internet and various computer programs—skill sets that, for this era, were seen as new and highly complicated. Allie's hard work and expertise in the business world are shown to pay off, exhibited by her lavish New York City apartment and expansive wardrobe filled with designer clothing.

The establishment of Allie's career mindedness and prowess may appear to be positive attributes; taken at face value, Allie appears to be a strong-willed and independent career-woman. However, as many scholars have noted, Allie's presence in the workforce is seen as threatening at best, penetrating a realm often inhabited solely by men and taking on an active role in the phallic order.

Robin Wood, in "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," for example, stresses that the basic formula for the American horror film rests on the disruption of normality on the part of the monster figure. "I use 'normality' here in a strictly nonevaluative sense to mean simply 'conformity to the dominant social norms,'"[18] Wood stresses here, arguing that the monster figure, in several cases, isn't merely a grotesque, fictional beast in the vein of a werewolf or vampire. Rather, the monster represented in most horror films derives from the "dramatization [...] of the repressed/the Other"[19]—figures that draw attention to what society represses or oppresses,[20] lying outside of the social symbolic and threatening its stability. As Wood suggests, any character within a horror film embodying "Othered" characteristics (non-white, non-male, non-bourgeois) is portrayed as the "monster." Consequently, Allie in *Single White Female*, through her active, assertive position within the business world, is portrayed as the "monster." Literally removing power from men within the phallic order, Allie figuratively castrates and assumes destructive control within patriarchy, becoming the *femme castratrice* and "monstrous feminine."

Susan Bromley and Pamela Hewitt in "*Fatal Attraction*: The Sinister Side of Woman's Conflict about Career and Family" extend the notion that the social "Other" is considered to be a destructive, monstrous character. The career woman in psychological horror films breaks from traditional notions of feminine behavior, assuming monstrous characteristics. In their analysis of *Fatal Attraction*, they stress that the underlying rhetorical message of this type of psychological horror film vilifies the career woman character, who deviates from traditional notions of feminine behavior in favor of economic and material gain. As they argue, thrillers including *Fatal Attraction* communicate the idea that "women who opt for the career track are to be viewed not merely as unfeminine, but also as destructive who must themselves be destroyed."[21] Aligning with Wood's discussion of the monster as "Other" and Grant's analysis of "yuppie horror," Bromley and Hewitt stress that the representation of the career woman in horror films threatens the stability of bourgeois norms such as the family unit and, in her sexuality and powerful nature, is shown to be a deceptive, volatile figure whose destruction internally threatens the stability of patriarchal society. As an inherently "monstrous" figure, the career woman in this context "challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity,"[22] shown as a terrifying figure that subordinates her male counterparts, removing them from and metaphorically castrating them within the workforce.

Allie is no exception to this negative portrayal of the career woman. Although she has the desire to marry and bear children, she is in no hurry to do so; instead, she actively works towards her career and resists male companionship in favor of a female roommate after her failed engagement to Sam. Additionally, as stressed above, Allie is seen to be an agent of castration within the workforce, and with her near-phallic powers, she is a destructive threat to the stability of her employer's business. A secondary plot within the

film features Allie's sordid relationship with her new employer Mitchell—he is initially represented as a slimy, manipulative figure who has the potential to subordinate Allie during her residency in his corporation. The tension between the two characters comes to a head in a rather unsettling scene featuring Allie and Mitch preparing to leave after a business meeting. As Mitchell persuades Allie to show him functions on her computer software, he proceeds to stand behind her, looking closely as she works on the computer. Mitchell then proceeds to sexually assault Allie, groping her breasts from behind and nearly forcing her to perform sexual acts. Instead of complying with his sexual demands, Allie violently attacks Mitch, hitting him in the groin and running away.

Resisting sexual temptations, Allie is shown to be strong-willed and dominant, denying images of woman as passive, compliant, and an object of desire adopted through patriarchal discourse. Allie's rejection of Mitchell's advances in this scene act as a type of symbolic castration, with her activity and dominance in the workforce subordinating and ultimately humiliating her male counterpart. Once in a position of sexual and economic power, Mitchell is now degraded, subject to the same type of threatening, "abject" terror[23] experienced by passive, otherwise voiceless victims of violence within traditional horror films. Moreover, Mitchell's hopes at regaining power within the industry are quashed towards the end of the film, solidifying his subordinated, castrated position: he and his secretary discover that Allie's software is equipped with a destructive, virus-type code, deleting all financial and creative data as her employment with the company draws to a close. The malware in this sense removes all traces of male economic success and power within the fashion house and furthers the notion that she is a castrating, threatening figure within the business world. Moreover, the programmed glitch in the software helps to reclaim Allie's creative agency, allowing her to be an active force financially, industrially, and artistically. By removing Mitchell's power and reclaiming her own dominance with the career world, Allie is shown to be a figure of castration that destroys the symbolic structure of the phallic order, decimating bourgeois ideals and becoming the "monstrous feminine."

Taken from a different perspective, however, the film can be seen as endorsing the idea that Hedy, not Allie, is the *femme castratrice* and "monstrous feminine" as a whole. That is, aligning with Creed's argument on the castrating woman, the female psychopath trope within several horror films emerges from the inability "to lead a 'normal' life in possession of friends and family [...] woman transforms into a monster when she is sexually and emotionally unfulfilled."[24] Hedy, who desperately wants human companionship and a surrogate sister in the form of Allie, can therefore be seen as the "monstrous feminine," symbolically castrating others and leading a path of destruction in order to achieve her proper place within the patriarchal social order. Throughout the film, Hedy slowly and actively seeks out to destroy her roommate's life, in the quest for achieving social and domestic fulfillment that

she was once denied. From stealing mail, to deleting important messages on Allie's answering machine, to manipulating her roommate for control within their apartment, Hedy is shown as "deceptive and unknowable,"[25] conforming to stereotypical images of woman as symbolic castrator and immediate threat to the social order. Furthermore, Hedy's destructive behaviors grow to violent and twisted levels—it is implied that she kills Allie's puppy in order to seek attention and control within the apartment, and gradually begins to cannibalize[26] the appearance of her roommate in order to steal her identity altogether. Reclaiming the once unattainable levels of domestic, financial, and social success within patriarchal society, Hedy subordinates and ultimately removes the power from her roommate, and transforms from a meek, ordinary, voiceless character into one that castrates and destroys.[27]

The Motif of Mirrors and Doubling in *Single White Female*

The motif of mirrors in *Single White Female* is established early in the narrative—the twin girls in the film's opening scene are introduced in the reflection of a mirror—and links to the overall theme of doubling that is important to the construction of femininity within filmic, patriarchal discourses. As many scholars have noted, the portrayal of mirrored images of woman in fiction is rather complex. For example, the *doppelganger* or double is a common feature of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, prevalent in Gothic fiction[28] and used to convey a sense of psychological or social anxiety. The female *doppelganger* motif, gaining prominence in the twentieth century, not only reflects these themes, but also stipulates various societal norms surrounding the construction of femininity. Through fashion, appearance, and masquerade,[29] female doubling and mirroring in film extends a rhetoric of what woman should be, according to patriarchal discourses, juxtaposed against a skewed, improper version of femininity that is against the social norm.

The mirror motif featured throughout *Single White Female* aligns with early visions of the female *doppelganger* trope, splitting the image of woman in order to compare and contrast proper versus improper visions of femininity. As Catherine Spooner observes, both Allie and Hedy "are continually framed by mirrors in the same way as the twins in the opening sequence":[30] throughout the film, the two characters are not only shown to look at each other within the frame of a mirror or reflective surface, but move as to suggest a mirroring effect between the women. Coincidentally or otherwise, the women mimic each other's body gestures, as if the two were looking at and responding to their own eerie reflections. In one scene, for example, the women begin to bond as they shop together and renovate their expansive apartment; as they walk along the streets of New York City, they stand closely next to each other, enjoying ice cream cones. Their simultaneous behaviors (moving at the same pace, looking in the same direction, even eating in the same way) suggest that they are a divided image of woman, split between two bodies but exhibiting the same patterns of behavior and ways of thinking. What's more, the women

are often shown standing side-by-side and with their faces close together, implicitly pointing to the splitting of the image of woman within patriarchal discourses.

Despite their similarities, as indicated by their growingly identical behaviors, Allie and Hedy are shown to be radically different, with the former embracing proper, prototypical femininity and the latter as improper and altogether "monstrous." Allie, on one hand, is shown to be physically appealing, modifying her appearance through fashion and masquerade and altogether becoming the site of masculine desire. In contrast, Hedy is shown to be dowdy and plain, her mousy brown hair hanging down her face and her small frame sporting loose-fitting, droopy clothing. Comparing "correct" versus "incorrect" visions of femininity, the film extends the *doppelganger* motif and communicates both gendered and social norms within patriarchal discourse. Ideally, as the film purports through the contrasted, mirrored images of Allie and Hedy, woman should embrace her role as the site of masculine desire, modifying her appearance in order to maintain her proper, and altogether unthreatening, status within the social order.

Importantly, the theme of the double utilized in the film is taken to a horrifying extreme: instead of merely portraying an image of woman that goes against patriarchal ideals, *Single White Female* constructs woman into a figure that actively seeks to destroy the fragile structure of society. In effect, the mirrored image of woman in *Single White Female* is presented as the *femme castratrice*, a monstrous character that, in essence, threatens and can wholly remove power from active male figures within the phallic order. Initially, it can be argued that the film places Allie in this threatening, "monstrous" role: in her connection to the mirror motif, Allie exudes "a symbolic *vanitas*, implying her stereotypical feminine narcissism."[31] Allie's near-obsessive ties to her own reflection are displayed throughout the narrative, as she casually glances at her mirrored image through reflective surfaces and appears to take pleasure in her highly coiffed, feminized appearance. Consequently, this female narcissism, which in itself is a negative quality by society's standards, translates into an overt acceptance and embracing of entirely feminine, "Othered" qualities. To put this in another way, Allie's doubled image within mirrors represents a vision of femininity outside of the boundaries of patriarchal control that define rationality, practicality, and overall proper behaviors. By looking at her own reflection, Allie forges an identity that is forever outside of the phallic order, willingly becoming the "Other" and "monster" in the social symbolic. Allie's threat to the symbolic, in turn, lies in her own overtly "Othered" behaviors, suggesting that "femininity itself is pathological, that the practices attendant on 'normal' femininity are in themselves deviant."[32]

Moreover, Allie's female narcissism and so-called *vanitas* lend itself to traditional conceptions of the *femme castratrice* in psychological horror films as a whole. As Creed suggests, the *femme castratrice* often takes on the characteristics of traditional, prescribed beauty;[33] in order to lure in male victims this figure is the site of both desire and terror, a deceptive force that can easily, and actively,

castrate those around her. Allie's trendy clothing, makeup, and haircut embraces prototypical femininity but uses it as a weapon, as an instrument to penetrate the social order and castrate those around her. Allie's hyper-femininity, moving beyond the site of desire, is used to her advantage in the realms of business and the home, making her an imperceptible threat to the social symbolic. Actively looking at and modifying her own appearance, Allie is able to reclaim her body and sexuality; she is the site of her own desire, distancing herself from traditional female passivity and removing power from others. In turn, despite being an initially likable character, "the one to whom we are obviously meant to warm, [Allie] is not a very likeable heroine."[34] In her close connection to her own mirrored image, therefore, Allie incites chaos and destruction within the phallic order, becoming the *femme castratrice* and "monstrous feminine."

Despite Allie's implicit connection to monstrosity, Hedy is ultimately portrayed as the *femme castratrice* during most of the film through her explicit connection to doubling and the mirror motif. Quite literally, Hedy references her own twin throughout the film admitting her own personal mirroring of the image of woman; due to her apparent lack of individual identity within the social symbolic, Hedy can therefore be seen as the grotesque, "Othered" vision of femininity that is repellent by society's standards. Additionally, Hedy's strong desire to steal Allie's identity through mirroring lends itself to monstrosity; much like the traditional *doppelganger* trope or vampire character in the horror genre,[35] Hedy consumes Allie's identity, becoming a complete replica of her roommate by the end of the film. Innocently enough, this doubling starts with the borrowing of material items: Hedy borrows Allie's clothing when her own gets soaked by the spraying of a broken sink, and the two are shown to exchange and lend out accessories including earrings as they become close friends. Guided by Allie's blind generosity and kindness, Hedy increasingly takes over the physical appearance of her roommate, and is revealed to swap out her old clothing for Allie's during the second act of the film. Moreover, in a haunting scene towards the film's finale, Hedy transforms into Allie's nearly identical twin, getting the same haircut and proclaiming, "I love myself like this,"[36] like the beautiful image of her popular, powerful roommate.

The eerie effect of Hedy's doubling—and so-called cannibalization[37]—of her roommate Allie lies in the initial motivation for stealing her identity. In part, this stems from guilt over her sister's death; Hedy has taken the blame for her twin's apparently accidental death, and in order to fill the void from this devastating accident, acquires a new twin in the form of Allie. Moreover, it is what Hedy does with her ability to mirror Allie's appearance that is all the more frightening, according to the film's standards—she frequently partakes in promiscuous behaviors, resists help and attention from her family, and tries to ruin Allie's reputation as a business woman and in her own personal relationships. Hedy's desire to become whole again, so to speak, to resolve the

part of her "that is missing,"[38] ultimately translates into destructive behaviors that not only threaten Allie's overall safety, but her honest reputation as well.

However, the horrific nature of Hedy's doubling of Allie lies in the fact that Hedy herself does not have an individual, fully-formed identity. Rather, she steals Allie's appearance in order to compensate for her own failing in the social symbolic, to enter the patriarchal order fully despite her status as social "Other." Throughout the narrative, for example, it is difficult to discern Hedy's true nature, motivation, or even real name—she shifts from the name "Hedra" to "Hedy" to her birth name, "Ellen Besch." As she adopts Allie's personality through the acquisition of material items, Hedy's mysterious origins, and apparent lack of identity, becomes more pronounced; Hedy physically transforms into a new woman as to suggest a distancing from her own reflection in the mirror,[39] her apparent lack in the social symbolic. Her incessant cleaning, shown initially to be compulsive and a bit annoying, subsequently furthers her attempt to abandon her incomplete identity and consume that which belongs to Allie. Hedy's aggressive emulation of Allie[40] and ultimate removal of her initial, albeit incomplete identity, is translated into wholly castrating, monstrous powers. Her attempts to conform to a complete, fully realized woman through the cannibalization of Allie's image and identity, allows Hedy to be seen as the *femme castratrice* or "monstrous feminine" within the film. Essentially, "in the process of achieving her desire"—to abandon her past life, to adopt Allie's appearance, to penetrate the phallic order—"Hedy becomes a monster."[41]

Additionally, Hedy's characterization as the *femme castratrice* lies in the "interrelation of identification and desire,"[42] in the ways that the mirrored image leads to larger discussions of the corrupted and corrupting powers of the female gaze. As scholars including Sianne Ngai and Scott Paulin have articulated,[43] Hedy's relation to the doubled image of woman, and to the mirror reflection of Allie, is grotesque and altogether threatening to the stability of the social order. The direction of Hedy's gaze when faced with her own image and the image of her roommate is characteristically active and male: quoting Hollinger, Catherine Spooner observes that Hedy "is often shown gazing at Allie with a mixture of desire, identification, and concealed malice."[44] When compared to Allie (who is often times shown as the object of the gaze, either in looking at herself or when looked at by male characters), Hedy takes on a subject position that is constructed as masculine, being able to identify with and even desire the doubled image of woman in the mirror. As a result, Hedy's monstrosity arises from her masculine, and subsequently lesbian gaze directed towards Allie and her doubled or mirrored image. Beyond threatening the institution of heterosexual desire and relationships, Hedy's masculine/lesbian gaze at the mirrored image of woman serves to remove the power of the look from those within the social symbolic, making her troubling gaze an active agent of castration within the phallic order.

The final sequence of *Single White Female* solidifies Hedy's position as the "monstrous feminine." Aligning with what critics including Deborah Jermyn

have asserted about the finale, Hedy is eventually represented as the "unacceptable face of femininity which must be defeated. As the abject she must be expelled, destroyed from her symbolic castration of the men she attacks, her violence and, particularly, her sexual excess."[45] This, as a whole, can be explained through the repeated motif of mirroring; although she fully changes her appearance and removes herself from the position as Allie's physical double at this point in time, Hedy nevertheless assumes and consumes various internal attributes of her unsuspecting roommate. From forcing Allie to book a flight in her name, to dictating a fake suicide note from Allie's perspective, to using Allie's fingerprints to cover up her own heinous crimes, Hedy goes beyond surface qualities and mirrors the very characteristics that construct Allie's identity and public persona. Blurring the lines between herself and her female foil, Hedy becomes Allie's symbolic double, and in keeping with the traditional female *doppelganger* motif, is an active threat to the otherwise passive, proper vision of femininity endorsed by patriarchal society.

After seriously harming (and even killing) the male protagonists of the film, as well as kidnapping and torturing her roommate, Hedy tries to force Allie to kill herself by overdosing on prescription drugs. As she hands her the pills, Hedy recognizes her own position as a female foil or double: "Did you know, identical twins are never really identical? There's always one who's prettier, and the one who's not does all the work."[46] As this statement implies, not only does Hedy recognize her own position as the inverted image of prototypical, acceptable femininity, but she embraces it, actively seeking revenge on her doubles by assuming, and ruining, their identities. Hedy's physical and emotional power over Allie in this sequence, however, comes to an abrupt halt, as Allie attacks Hedy with a glass of water in the hopes of escaping her clutches. The two women then engage in a thrilling cat-and-mouse chase, physically fighting and running throughout their sweeping apartment complex. Fully removing herself from her *doppelganger* and securing her own identity, Allie exclaims, "I'm not your sister, Hedy. Not anymore!"[47] and flees from Hedy, who has been briefly pinned down and restrained by Allie's neighbor, so as to not shoot Allie with a concealed handgun.

Hedy (who, in an earlier scene, fights and chokes Allie in an elevator) eventually arrives in the basement of the building, where she plans to burn her roommate's presumably lifeless body in an incinerator. Rummaging through boxes and eventually finding a rusty wheelbarrow, Hedy returns to Allie's body, only to find that it is missing. Shocked and visibly worried, Hedy looks for Allie in the dark corners of the basement, shouting for her roommate and defending herself with a sharp grappling hook. Allie, who is revealed to be hiding in the ceiling, looks on and throws a rat at her nemesis, in an attempt to thwart Hedy's murderous impulses; nevertheless, Hedy pursues Allie and searches intensely for her in every corner. Hedy, in a fit of rage, eventually mistakes her mirrored image for Allie—a clear indication that she has not fully separated from her adopted, doubled identity. The scene ends in Hedy's destruction, as Allie appears from the ceiling and stabs Hedy to death.

Single White Female's destructive conclusion extends the notion that Hedy, through her delusions and active mirroring of Allie's persona, is a *femme castratrice*, a monstrous figure that has the potential to hinder normal (read: heteronormative) identity development within patriarchal society. As an active agent of destruction, Hedy must be destroyed by a figure that fully adheres to heteronormative visions of femininity, in order for balance to be restored within the social symbolic. Moreover, the film's coda—which features a voice-over of Allie lamenting over Hedy's apparent mental illness—blatantly communicates the overall notion of female doubling as both natural and highly dangerous. That is, the final shot of the film features a photograph of both Hedy and Allie, ripped in half and placed together as to suggest the seamless fusing together of the women's faces. By returning back to the mirrored image of woman, the film suggests that woman's dual nature is an inherent—albeit constructed—feature of femininity. The "monstrous feminine" is an inescapable concept within patriarchal society, a symbolic threat that persists even after the death of the literal *femme castratrice*.

Notes

[1] Here, I will be using the singular *woman*, as this reflects a more theoretical conception of the female image. *Women*, on the other hand, will come into play when describing an actual, physical female entity.
[2] Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*. Routledge, 2006; Barry Keith Grant, "Rich and Strange: the Yuppie Horror Film," *Journal of Film and Video* 48.1/2 (1996): 4–16.
[3] *Variety*'s Todd McCarthy also held less-than-positive opinions of the film in his 1992 review, noting that the film's "excellent lead performances" and impressive visual style are offset by the tired, often over-exaggerated use of conventions from the aptly named "predator from hell" subgenre of mainstream horror films. "Thriller aspects of the story, and suspense leading up to the climactic showdown, are handled expertly enough to get audiences lathered up. [The] formula basically works here, although it's beginning to wear thin." Todd McCarthy, "Review: Single White Female," *Variety* 10 August (1992).
[4] Peter Travers, "Single White Female," *Rolling Stone* 14 August (1992).
[5] Roger Ebert was one of the more noted critics who praised the film, asserting: "This is a story which, in other hands, could have simply been an all-female slasher film, but Barbet Schroeder, who produced and directed it [*Single White Female*], has a mordant humor that pushes the material over the top. It is a slasher movie, and a little more." Roger Ebert, "Single White Female," 14 August 1992.
[6] Vincent Canby, "Single White Female (1992) Review/Film; A Devoted and Deadly Roommate," *New York Times* 14 August 1992.
[7] Owen Gleiberman, "Movie: Single White Female," *Entertainment Weekly* 14 August 1992.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Barry Keith Grant, ed., *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015), 4.

[10] Ibid., 5.
[11] Ibid., 8.
[12] Ibid., 10.
[13] In my larger master's thesis on the "monstrous feminine," I also analyze *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich, 1962) and *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976).
[14] *Single White Female*, directed by Barbet Schroeder (1992; Columbia Pictures), DVD.
[15] Steven Weber, who portrays the character Sam in the film, aptly observes the powerless position of men throughout the film, quoted in an interview as saying that he adopts the "traditional female role—I prance around naked and then get killed after sex." Quoted in Jermyn, Deborah. "Rereading the Bitches from Hell: A Feminist Appropriation of the Female Psychopath," *Screen* 37.3 (1996), 265.
[16] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 89.
[17] Ibid., 105.
[18] Robin Wood and Richard Lippe, eds. *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), 31.
[19] Ibid., 28.
[20] Ibid., 29.
[21] Susan Bromley and Pamela Hewitt, "Fatal Attraction: The Sinister Side of Women's Conflict about Career and Family," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26.3 (1992): 17.
[22] Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine*, 151.
[23] Ibid., 125.
[24] Ibid., 122.
[25] Ibid., 136.
[26] Ibid., 122.
[27] Hedy's monstrosity is also illustrated through her connection to the motif of dark enclosures, passageways, and subterranean locations. For example, she is always hiding in her darkly lit apartment, is shown to frequent an underground sex club, and enacts her destruction towards Allie in the basement and eerie corridors of the apartment. A direct parallel to the *vagina dentata*, dark corridors, and underground spaces are associated with evil powers, and when featured alongside female characters, presents castration threats brought about by the *femme castratrice*. As a result, Hedy is seen as a truly evil, base character, one with the power to engulf and destroy those around her. Cf. Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine*, and Grant, "Rich and Strange."
[28] Catherine Spooner, "Cosmo-Gothic: The Double and the Single Woman," *Women: A Cultural Review* 12.3 (2001): 292–3.
[29] Ibid., 293.
[30] Ibid., 302.
[31] Scott D. Paulin, "Sex and the Singled Girl: Queer Representation and Containment in Single White Female," *Camera Obscura* 13.1 37 (1996): 47.
[32] Spooner, "Cosmo-Gothic," 301.
[33] Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine*, 128.
[34] Jermyn, "Rereading the Bitches from Hell," 264.
[35] Paulin, "Sex and the Singled Girl," 44.
[36] *Single White Female*, directed by Barbet Schroeder (1992; Columbia Pictures), DVD.
[37] Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine*.
[38] *Single White Female*, directed by Barbet Schroeder (1992; Columbia Pictures), DVD.

[39] Spooner, "Cosmo-Gothic," 299.
[40] Sianne Ngai, "Jealous Schoolgirls, Single White Females, and Other Bad Examples: Rethinking Gender and Envy," *Camera Obscura* 16.2 (2001): 204.
[41] Spooner, "Cosmo-Gothic," 303.
[42] Paulin, "Sex and the Singled Girl," 46.
[43] Ngai, "Jealous Schoolgirls"; Paulin "Sex and the Singled Girl."
[44] Spooner, "Cosmo-Gothic," 302.
[45] Jermyn, "Rereading the Bitches from Hell," 265.
[46] *Single White Female*, directed by Barbet Schroeder (1992; Columbia Pictures), DVD.
[47] Ibid.

Mobilizing the Grotesque: The Anti-War Publications of Ernst Friedrich and Frederick A. Barber

Emily Gallagher
The Australian National University

All the treasury of words of all men of all lands suffices not, in the present and in the future, to paint correctly this butchery of human beings. Here...a picture of war, objectively true…obtained by the inexorable, incorruptible photographic lens…to bear witness.
~Ernst Friedrich[1]

In 1924, Ernst Friedrich, published his *War against War!*—a photographic collection of over a hundred and fifty images—to protest against the butchery of war. Friedrich's publication, soon followed by Frederick A. Barber's *The Horror of It* in 1932, capitalized on the widespread, almost rampant belief that photographs are objectively true and can escape the subjective dilemmas of literary history.[2] This tendency to use photographs to narrate histories, impose particular memories, or challenge established identities has become increasingly common in the postmodern world. Still, photographs alone often fall short of being able to institutionalize a new identity. Very much aware of this limitation, Friedrich and Barber turned to the literary and artistic concept of the grotesque to invoke horror, uproot, and reconstruct the victimhood identities of the interwar period. Filling their publications with an onslaught of mutilated and barbaric images, these two authors demonstrate the power of horror as a psychological response, rather than a genre, in deconstructing race-related sympathies, undermining nationalist victim subjects, and redefining the victim as a human subject to further a moral cause.[3] In the wake of the Second World War, where some belligerent nations mobilized grotesque war photography for violent ideological causes, the use of the grotesque in anti-nationalistic pacifism has garnered less academic attention than it deserves. Through a study of grotesque form in Friedrich and Barber's publications this paper reveals the extraordinary interaction between horror and the grotesque in a plea for peace, rather than violence.

Introduction

On the first pages of *War against War!* Friedrich declares boldly that he knows the only practical way of preventing war. The way is twofold: first, we must examine the causes and nature of war, and then we must arm ourselves with the "weapon of knowledge and sharp sword of the mind."[4] After this he concludes that "we may…emerge victorious from the fight" having overcome the dark chains of oppression and freed ourselves from the slavery of the State."[5] Upon reading this section of Friedrich's short introduction many assumptions can easily be made about the author. In fact, it is no surprise that a number of readers will return the book to its shelf at this point. It is a bold and optimistic claim, one that has been recycled relentlessly in anti-war campaigns over the centuries. However, whatever is ordinary about Friedrich's "call to arms" in the opening paragraphs of *War Against War!* does not continue in the 196 pages that follow. Friedrich's "examination," and the "weapon of knowledge" he proclaims so boldly, saw the ugly war of 1914–1918 printed onto paper and displayed in the shop-windows of *Freie Jugend* publishing house in Germany like it had not been displayed before. Horror was brought to life through the grotesque in a valiant, eventually futile, attempt at anti-nationalistic pacifism.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part I, "Navigating Victimhood," deals with the contextual knowledge and challenges of the study. Part II tackles the disparity in existing literature on the grotesque to justify the grotesque quality of Friedrich and Barber's publications. Finally, parts III and IV assess the authority of the grotesque as a medium to provoke horror and institutionalize victimization rhetoric.

Part I: Navigating Victimhood

War is about "us and them," or as Friedrich describes, it is about "the victimized against the profiteers."[6] Regardless of the national flag that marks the uniform, this reality is widely agreed upon. What is not agreed upon is the identity of the victim. Nations compete endlessly to establish themselves as the victim when it comes to war. Germany and Austro-Hungary, Britain and France, as well as Serbia and Bulgaria all saw themselves as victims. Over the centuries state leaders have continually engaged in vigorous political and social propaganda in their attempts to establish a legitimate victimhood claim, both convinced equally of their opponents' aggression. Not long after Winston Churchill stood before students at Oxford University and proclaimed that "whenever war threatens or breaks out we are at the side of the victim," Adolf Hitler addressed his Parliament to declare that Germany was still "suffering under the torture of [the]… problem" of the "Western States" from the First World War (WWI).[7]

This process, where by an individual or state creates a "victim subject" as a way of appealing to a collective conscience is known as "victimization rhetoric."[8] Though this kind of self-imposed claim can be legitimate, it is also a morally complicated and sensitive process. If victims are seen to be active in their victimhood status or have not clearly been subjected to intentional and severe wrongdoing, they may be accused of being inauthentic and forced to relinquish their claim.[9] Hence, Churchill both referred to the pluralized "we" in their proclamations in an attempt to side step the sensitive "I." The challenge, then, is how individuals can act as stakeholders in hegemonic frameworks to validate their own victimhood identity without undermining their own status as a victim? To cope with the highly sensitive condition of a victimhood claim, those making one often use visual and/or literary forms that not only evidence the atrocity committed against them, but can amplify its emotional extremes.[10] For two anti-war activists in the interwar period the grotesque form would fulfill both of these requirements. First and foremost, it would provide a medium to exhibit abhorrent and senseless horror[11]—the kind that provokes a visceral reaction. Viewers skin may crawl and images produce a bone-chilling sensation in the pit of their stomachs. Simultaneously, the grotesque and its associated horror would allow Friedrich and Barber to exaggerate grossly the vice of the perpetrator. To the extent that the stakeholder becomes irrelevant, even invisible, beside the extreme illustration of the victim and their aggressor, secures the legitimacy of their victimhood claim.

The authority of the grotesque to mobilize horror in a way that imposes an extreme "black and white" perception of a historical event absolves the stakeholders of their involvement in its creation. It is the difference between a child saying "he pushed me" or lifting his shirt to show a purple bruise spreading across his chest. In both cases, the child makes a victimhood claim, yet in the second instance the claim is far more powerful. This example also hints at the objective authority granted to the visual form and its popularity as a medium to craft victimization rhetoric. In the words of Susan Sontag, "photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus."[12] As Sontag suggests and pioneers of postmodern theory agree, photograph collections, like any form of art or literature, are constructed within a polyvalent setting with a multiplicity of views, subjective interpretations, and socio-political motivations.[13] They can be used simultaneously to narrate different histories, impose various memories, or challenge an array of identities. When paired with the grotesque's capacity to violate reason and amplify horror the photograph can be further used to reapprove an existing victimhood or institutionalize a new one.

It is important to recognize that any analysis that deconstructs the politics of victimhood, especially involving the grotesque, must navigate a sensitive and potentially destructive discourse.[14] Categories of victims are caught in a complex, ever negotiated, immanent, and impermanent state of victimhood.[15] Academics ought to be concerned that assessing victims as "objects" of study

may breach moral boundaries, in some cases even become an accomplice in the act of victimization.[16] But silence imposes its own dangers and as pioneers Foucault, Said, and Olssen have argued, analysis that explicitly deals with constructed categories is central to exposing social power dynamics and institutionalized structures.[17] Essentially, if victimhood is a constructed human condition or situated social phenomena, rather than a naturally occurring identity, its origins, nature, continuity, and reproduction should be a subject of rational interpretative analysis and skeptical inquiry. By subjecting contemporary victimhood claims to acute critical inquiry, its normalized condition can be confronted and delegitimized for the benefit of individuals who may be oppressed by it.[18]

Part I: Ernst Friedrich and Frederick A. Barber

Published in 1924, Ernst Friedrich's *War against War! (Krieg dem Krieg!)* [fig. 1.1.] was a violent call for "war against" glorified national war memory, depicting a gruesome transnational interpretation of WWI through maimed portraits, brutal acts of violence and mutilated corpses. Totaling 242 pages, each publication includes four translations in German, French, Dutch, and English. Its contents consist of a lengthy introduction, a reproduction of popular war propaganda, followed by a series of 183 graphic photographs and impassioned captions. *War against War!* was published following a larger body of graphic accounts from the 1860s–1920s including the etchings of Otto Dix's *The War [Der Krieg]* and Goya's *Disasters of War (Los Desastres de la Guerra)*, photography by Roger Fenton and Matthew Brady, and literary pieces such as Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*.[19] Still, although *War against War!* borrowed heavily from its contemporaries, Friedrich's role as a leading figure in German pacifist activities, proletarian youth, and founder of the first International Anti-War Museum in Berlin has attracted a significant degree of written scholarship and public awareness.[20]

Unlike his predecessor, little is known of Frederick Barber who first published a similar shorter collection *The Horror of It: Camera Records of War's Gruesome Glories* in 1932 [fig. 1.1]. A speech in the House of Representatives by Honorary Ross A. Collins in March that year and forewords written by leading American liberalist Pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick and feminist Carrie Chapman Catt suggest that Barber was a well-regarded American socialist. In 1935, he also published a longer compilation of pictures, cartoons, and short articles titled *'Halt!' Cry of the Dead: A pictorial primer on war and some ways of working for peace*.[21] But besides John Kinder's recent analysis in his book *Paying with Their Bodies*, *The Horror of It* remains the prevailing circulating reference to his name in available contemporary scholarship.[22] In comparison to Friedrich's lengthy introduction and bold declaration of war, Barber's publication is humbling. Totaling 96 pages, it omits an introduction, leaves page numbers absent, and labels photographs with ambiguous one-to-three-word captions. Despite the attention given to *War against War!*, Barber's comparable work has

remained largely untouched by the critical eye of contemporary literary and historical analysis.

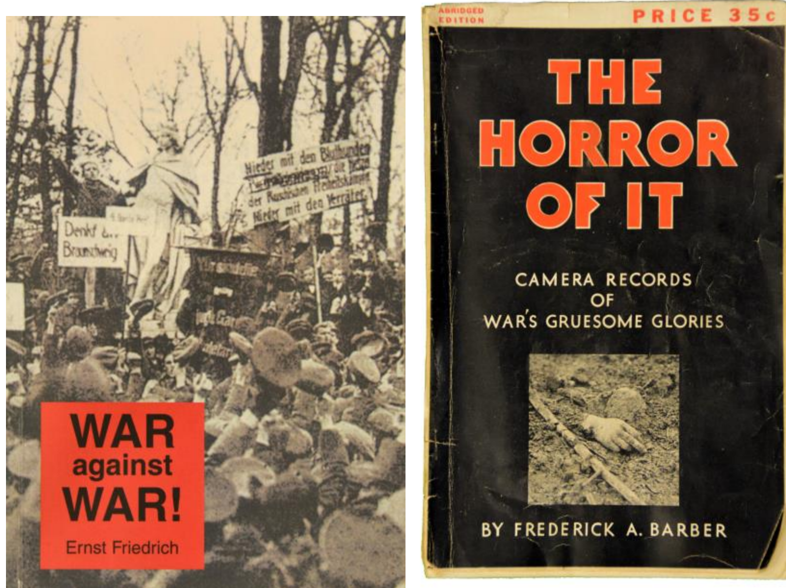

Figure 1.1[23]

Examined concurrently as an independent study for the first time, both publications illuminate with fascinating clarity the strategic platform of grotesque photography and its associated horror.[24] Endeavoring to reconstruct a brutal historical narrative to "exterminate…war enthusiasts," the grotesque in these publications acts as a powerful medium to contest the dominating victimhood identities of interwar Europe.[25]

Part II: Are they Grotesque?

An ancient phenomena, yet only emerging as a meaningful aesthetic category in the early twentieth century, the grotesque has been described as "ridiculous, distorted, unnatural,"[26] "grossly exaggerated and absurd,"[27] "bizarre and vulgar…something incongruous,"[28] "ugly,"[29] "a bodily disgust,"[30] and an expression of "psychic currents."[31] Essentially, it is a dimension of expression and artistic representation that has no abiding or universal definition.[32] The repertoire of synonyms and adjectives used by scholars in the modern and postmodern era to define the grotesque are certainly palpable and intense. But, they are also inconsistent, and for critics dealing with the category of the grotesque this poses a tremendous methodological challenge.[33] Frankly, how can anyone examine the impact of the grotesque form when there is such dissent over its very nature?

Though the gravity of this dilemma is heavy for scholars of the grotesque it is subdued by the shared nature of its condition. Rather than concede defeat, an unspoken practice has developed where authors evaluate and justify the framework they apply in relation to their chosen literary or artistic source. Many authors even continue to narrate the linguistic and conceptual history of the grotesque in their opening paragraphs and chapters.[34] For Friedrich and Barber, the same vigorous process must be undertaken. In this study, the evaluation of the grotesque serves a secondary purpose, to illuminate how the grotesque form can mobilize moral horror to destabilize dominating victimhood identities. Recognizing that no one paper can be all-inclusive this paper will assess four dominating characteristics: dualism, the perpetual display of horror, the verisimilar, and the aberration from the ideal.

Firstly, in literature that analyzes the frameworks of the grotesque there is one clear theoretical consensus on the necessity of dualism.[35] In the 1950s, both Philip Thomson and Wolfgang Kayser, possibly the two most quoted theorists in this field, agreed that the grotesque is "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" and "the unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical."[36] Essentially, the grotesque is a mode of expression that unifies two contradictory aesthetics and concepts. For a work to be considered grotesque it must defy predetermined aesthetics and violate conceptual categories.[37] Additionally, Peter Fingesten argues that the clash of incompatibles must be congruent, meaning the absurdity of the aesthetic form cannot dominate the grotesque concept and vice versa.[38]

The very intent of Friedrich and Barber's publications—to select photographs that reverse the familiar illustrated themes exposed by the official patriotic military propaganda of early twentieth century Europe—signals their conceptual platform as grotesque.[39] While the passage of time may have dulled the absurdity of some of these themes, both activists still explore fierce extremes, controversial claims, and absurd paradoxes. For example, these two publishers declare: a mother's dead son is "grub for animals,"[40] children are murderers,[41] hanging soldiers on the gallows in dress ups is funny,[42] mutilated corpses in trees look like birds,[43] the rotting naked corpses of starved typhoid patients died with honor,[44] the crushed corpses of dying soldiers are the "marvellous work of God,"[45] and young girls who flirt with soldiers are disgusting.[46]

Unlike the conceptual grotesque, providing evidence for the aesthetic grotesque in Friedrich and Barber's work is crippled by the polarized views of scholars in this field. The interpretative condition of literary and visual art has been further complicated by the difficulty of retrospectively applying the category of "grotesque" to works that did not explicitly claim to be grotesque. Despite ongoing disagreement, convincing evidence for the aesthetic grotesque in Friedrich and Barber's publications can be supported by a comparison with the grotesque etchings of Otto Dix's *The War (Der Krieg)*. Published in 1924, Dix's portfolio of 50 graphic anti-war images is widely recognized as the

epitome of grotesque art. Not only are Friedrich and Barber's photographs similar to Dix's, many look like photographic reproductions. For example, Dix's *Wounded Man* (*Verwundeter*) (Autumn 1916, Bapaume),[47] which depicts a mortally-wounded soldier during the Battle of the Somme with bulging eyes, a twisted left arm, decaying flesh and a horrifying silent scream, is essentially a copy of "German song of hate"[48] [fig. 1.2] in *War against War!* Likewise, Friedrich's twenty-four mutated portraits [fig. 1.1, 2.1 and 2.2], six of which are included in Barber's publication, are palpable reproductions of Dix's "Skin Graft (Transplantation)" and "A Dying Soldier."[49] More loosely, Barber's "No Man's Land," "Crumpled, "Silent," and "Overtaken" [fig. 4.3] are easily comparable to a number of Dix's etchings, including "Skin Graft" and "Wounded Man." This reproductive relationship continues in images of western front trenches, chemical warfare, brothels, corpse portraiture, and decomposing bodies, presenting strong historical and visual evidence that Friedrich and Barber's photographs are the "empirical reality" of The War.[50] Essentially, the category of the grotesque cannot be applied to one without justification that it is not in the other.

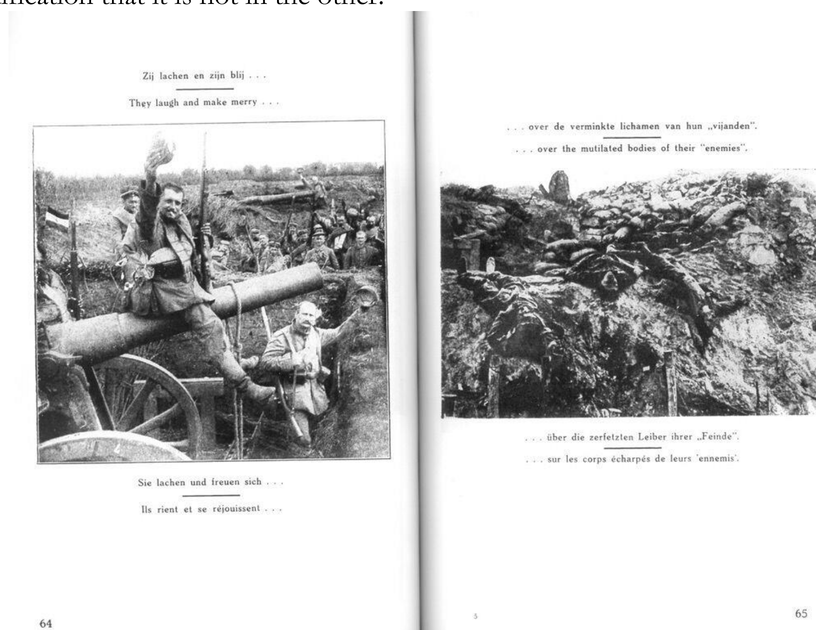

Figure 1.2

Independently, not all the photographs included in the two publications could be labelled with dualistic features. However, Friedrich and Barber's photographs are not intended to be viewed in isolation and, when seen within their broader context, reflect well-defined aesthetic and ideological paradoxes. For example, on pages 64 and 65 [fig. 1.2] Friedrich uses oppositional positioning, similarity in form, and associated annotations to pair two virtually unrelated photographs of a group of men and a series of corpses. On closer

inspection, the landscapes and ethnicities in the two images are undoubtedly different and the captions themselves suggest that the corpses belong to opposing forces. Still, at first glance the viewer assumes a linear cause and effect sequence where the second mutilated photograph displays the same “merry” unit in the first image. The fact that the viewer connects these images, despite no explicit claim on the author’s behalf, reflects the prevailing dualistic force of the grotesque to connect discordant aesthetics and concepts. More explicit arrangements where the captions connect the identities of pictured soldiers are prominent throughout the publication, noticeably on pages 50 and 51, 94 and 95 [fig. 1.3].

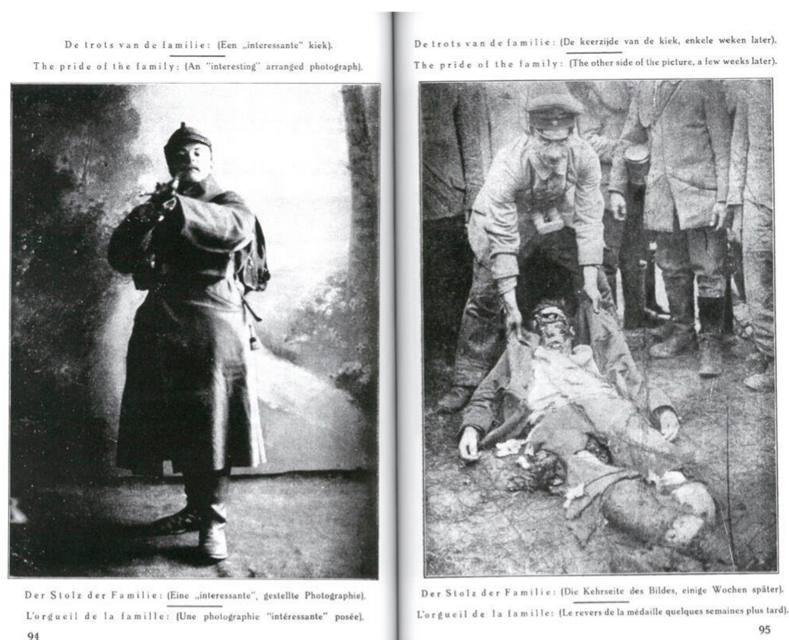

Figure 1.3

The sequenced captions also play a crucial role in connecting the photographs and balancing dualistic aesthetics and concepts. Allan Sekula goes so far to argue that the captions, alongside layout are responsible for the meanings conveyed in any photograph collection.[51] For example, a smiling German infantryman captioned “Papa as ‘hero’ in the enemies country…” is juxtaposed with a photo of a German corpse with the caption “How Papa was found two days later…”[52] Another set of paired photographs uses the caption “The pride of the family” [fig. 1.3] in each opposing image to colligate visually an official portrait against the mutilated corpse of another soldier. In both examples, the captions create a salient link between the images that cause an existential clash between the known man and the mutilated body on the opposing page. The captions establish a dichotomy that demands an agentive

response by the viewer to choose the individual fate—both cannot exist concurrently.[53]

Coexisting with dualism are three prominent features that categorize Friedrich and Barber's photography in the field of the grotesque: the perpetual display of horror, the verisimilar, and the aberration from the ideal to create "misshapen, ugly, exaggerated, or even formless [human figures]."[54] Halfmann and Young describe similar features, though they do not label them the same, arguing that repulsion, the casting of the familiar, and aesthetic tensions are non-negotiable markers of grotesque images.[55] Friedrich's intention "to paint correctly this butchery of human beings,"[56] is clear and his collection of twenty-four maimed portraits are saturated with mutilated images. Titled "Railwayman," "Fusilier R. Wounded," "War agrees with me," and "The 'health resort' of the proletarian," these four portraits reflect the perpetual horror, verisimilar, and aberration from the ideal with striking clarity [fig. 2.1 and 2.2]. Barber himself includes four of the mutilated portraits from *War against War!* in his publication calling on his viewers to "go look at them…the marvellous work of God."[57] Clinical in purpose, these disfigured physiognomies, labelled as "men without faces" by Bernd Ulrich, were sourced from state medical facilities in Europe.[58] Of all the photographs in Friedrich and Barber's publications, the repulsion generated by these portraits has attracted the most public attention.

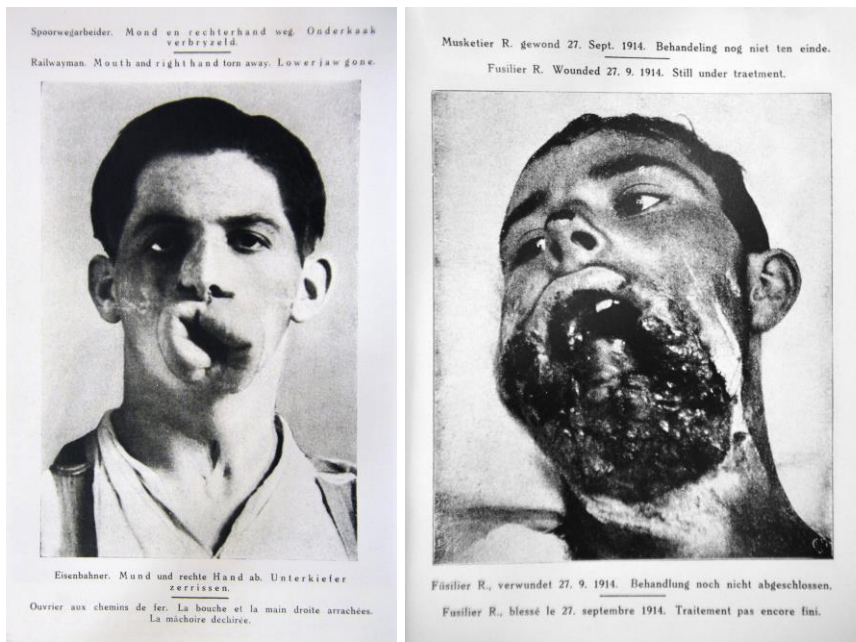

Figure 2.1

The actuality of the faceless and formless condition, a face so deformed "it" bears no remnant of "its" former identity, climaxes in different images for various scholars. The "jarring chiaroscuro against the dark backdrop" in Barber's "Living death" and Friedrich's "The 'health resort' of the proletarian" [fig. 2.2] is dominant for one scholar, whilst for another the visceral and moral horror culminates in Friedrich's first portrait, "The Visage of the War."[59] The portraits go one step further than their predecessors by shifting the viewer's role from an observer to a participant. Both activists are aware and highly sensitive to the existence of the viewer as the third component of photographs. Intended to provoke a visceral hatred of warfare, one that could be channeled into future political action, Barber and Friedrich enforce an invasive gaze that implicates the viewer in the depicted cruelty. In the physiognomies the viewer sees the victim subject through the eyes of the perpetrator.

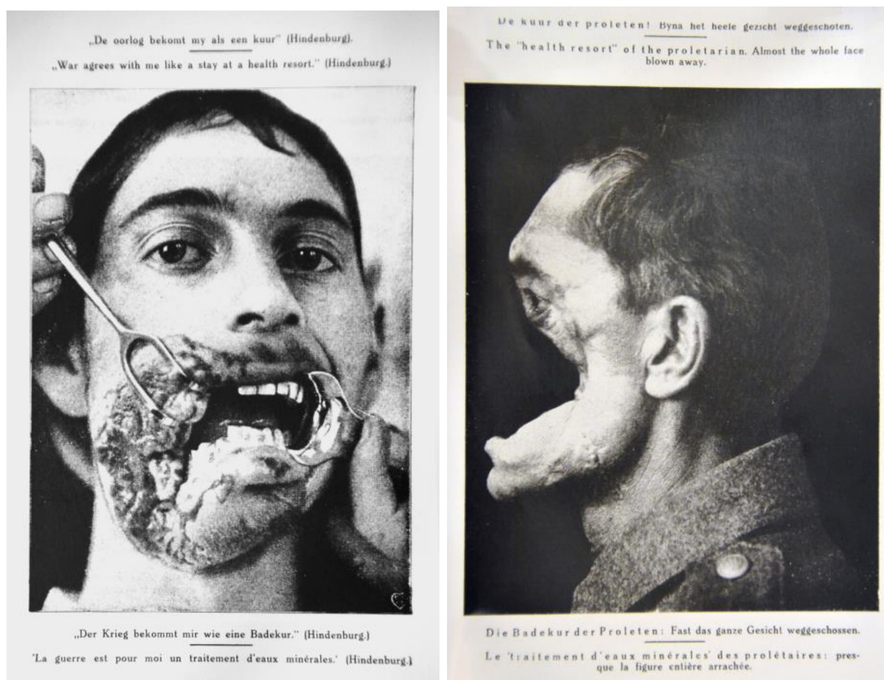

Figure 2.2

As the viewer turns the pages, the mass of nameless caricatures and their accompanying clinical captions are intended to provoke a sense of panic, guilt, and disgusted anger. Whilst the lasting emotional response is not cohesive and can vary between individuals, the portraits are timeless in their ability to neutralize any pre-existing rationalizations surrounding the "value" of war. The collective power of the grotesque concept and aesthetics in these sequences cannot be justified by the ideological imperatives that national patriotism has

established. The revulsion that often manifests in the first viewing of the photographs is a response to an unconscious cognitive struggle. The familiarity and ideal of the human subject matter clashes violently with the mutilated "inhumane" form. The inability to process the image rationally can compel the viewer to pull away psychically. In a response to the reproduction of the image "Living death" from *The Horror of It* in a public handbill, a critic declared of the portrait, "everything is wrong. The young man is a terrible sight to look at."[60] The verisimilar displayed in excess prompts the viewer to look away, and it is this very action that could be labeled the first act of undermining established victimhood identities.

Figure 3.1

The verisimilar and perpetual horror is not limited to portraiture, and Barber's opening page of *The Horror of It* engages with similar photographic features, depicting a detached hand that almost appears to be crawling off the page [fig. 3.1]. Despite the normality of the hand, the absence of the arm is the subjugating feature of the image and violates biological norms. A photograph near the end of Friedrich's publication [fig. 3.2] uses a similar analogous form where two severed heads are crookedly stabbed on Spanish bayonets.[61] Accompanied by two soldiers on either side of the bayonets, the decapitated heads and full form soldiers create a linear assembly of faces in front of a white-blanketed background. Like the detached hand the collision between the "familiar" corporal form and the asymmetric form evokes an elusive psychological shock and ethical panic.[62] Both Fingesten and Maria Marr agree that the absence of a limb, head, or body is a legitimate aspect of the grotesque

genre.[63] It facilitates an aesthetic and conceptual paradox that promotes feelings of outrage and sickening dread.

Figure 3.2

Notwithstanding its categorical and visual features, the most resounding argument for the grotesque is realized when the viewer situates "the images within the expectations of the written word."[64] Friedrich, like Spanish artist Francisco Goya in his captions in *Desastres de la Guerra* in the early 20th century, embraces a type of dark satirical humor where images contradict and resist their associated written counterparts. For example, the normalized label on page 216, "War agrees with me like a stay at a health resort" [fig. 2.2], clashes with the convulsive facial mutilation of its associated portrait. The image becomes a type of dystopia where the expectation of the written word does not conform to its photographic representation, provoking feelings of confusion and dread for the images that follow. This contradictory pairing that embodies the satirical modalities of the grotesque saturates Friedrich's and, to a lesser extent, Barber's publication. This literary and visual pairing serves as a way to invalidate specific romanticized perceptions of war victims. Intended to act as historical witnesses to "war's gruesome glories," both works replicate grotesque themes with a cyclical intensity that intentionally undermines ingrained national memory to coordinate collective victimhood rhetoric.[65]

Part III: Grotesque as a tool for reform

As it has been argued, victims can, and frequently do, act as stakeholders in dominating hegemonic frameworks such as victimhood identities.[66] As Cohen observes in his esteemed analysis *States of Denial*, the victims of Israel-

Palestine, Bosnia-Serbia, and Northern Ireland have "an acute political consciousness and a detailed historical sense of their victimhood."[67] Friedrich and Barber were no exception to this condition and were deeply aware of the power exchange between victims and perpetrators. Resistant to state-sanctioned patriotic war narratives and ethnic orientated identities, both pacifists sought to destabilize and reconstruct existing hegemonic victimhood identities subsisting from the First World War.

To construct a more "objectively true and faithful history," both anarchists needed a medium that could "attack the double standards of morality."[68] In the words of Friedrich they needed a "weapon of knowledge."[69] A traditional preoccupation of reformers and agitators, the grotesque could be paired with the "ostensibly accurate, impartial function" of the photographic form to become a form of 'modern' resistance."[70] "An important implication of grotesque realism is that nothing mobilizes consumer-citizens to social activism more than shit in the face," observes Professor Craig Thompson.[71] Crude in form, his statement is an extraordinary reflection on the authority of grotesque photography as a dominating tactic to empower an anarchist cause. As Thompson concludes, the carnivalesque (or grotesque) is a "counterdominant force" that "proactively subverts the conventions and norms" of conformist mandates.[72] The pioneers of the grotesque agree, as Kayser explains, "the structurings of the grotesque are the strongest and most obvious resistance against any rationalism and against systematics of thought."[73] For Friedrich and Barber, the revulsion that the horrific grotesque induced precipitated the surrender to the rhetoric of victimhood, allowing stakeholders to attack the monologic victimhood discourse that may dominate their retrospective social and political spheres before they established their own.[74]

As reformers during and after WWI, both artists were confronting resolute militaristic and nationalized history, particularly Friedrich with Germany's grievances against the peace treaty of Versailles which imposed significant reparation payments and stripped them of substantial territories. Deep social insecurities and cognitive dissonance saturated Europe endorsing the familiarity offered by traditional historical discourse. Despite the emergence of new progressive historiographical scholarship in this period such as Lucien Bloch and Marc Febvre's Annales School and the work of R. H. Tawney, public history was being viewed as distinctively nationalistic and in isolation to other state powers.[75] As a result, Markova points out that if activists were to be successful they did not only need to construct new frameworks for collective remembering, they needed to contest with a "solid cultural canon."[76] Titling his work *The Horror of It*, and describing the work as a "gruesome task," Barber is well aware of the grotesque nature of his work.[77] Friedrich's intentions are even more definitive, announcing his aims to present the "gruesomely mutilated."[78] The grotesque was not a random aesthetic attribute, but rather, an intentional and intrinsic element of their collections.

Capitalizing on the grotesque aesthetic and its conceptual capacity for paradoxes, Friedrich and Barber first sought to blur established identities, geographical specificity, and the securities of ethnicity. By illustrating extreme brutality through a restricted gaze on the victim both authors implemented a type of grotesque that Majumdar describes as "repressive."[79] The viewer sees an onslaught of twisted mutilated faces, dismembered dead bodies, the malicious violation of disabled civilians, naked emancipated soldiers, and the desecration of rotting corpses. Dr. Karen McCluskey observes:

> The images tap into some kind of primordial human sentiment, which baulks at the unnaturalness of the human form in this state; the blow is all the more acute with the knowledge that humans caused this unnatural desecration of its own form.[80]

It depicts the remnants of some kind of sadistic carnival that only validates the moral innocence of the victim and nullifies the viewer's capacity to justify the actions of the perpetrator.[81] It is here, in the repressive grotesque, that the audience observes the awesome authority of horror within the grotesque form to subvert and conquer existing hegemonic frameworks by imposing a new historical reality. Combined with the prestige of optical empiricism and the prevailing belief that the photograph is "simply (a) statement of fact," Friedrich and Barber made a "documentary" claim to history.[82]

In a state of panic and sickening horror, the audience is faced with the reality that it cannot defend or understand this "history" through frameworks of patriotism and alterity.[83] In this moment of crisis, the dualistic character of the grotesque, to juxtapose two discordant realities, served a unique purpose for Friedrich and Barber: it allowed them to craft an undefined and fluent category of victims. Essentially, they presented a humanist alternative to the ethnic and/or nationalistic orientated frameworks that they undermined. Remarkably, both authors employ noticeably different literary and visual tactics to advance their common human victim. Friedrich favors literary modes and explicitly declares his ambitions in the first sentence of his introduction: "I, who am falsely called 'German' instead of 'man.'"[84] Instead, Barber chooses to neglect written text and employs an absence of uniforms and ethnic markers that suggests a meticulous selective editing. As Harry Fosdick mentions in the foreword of the 1936 edition, Barber's book includes a "back[ing off] of the camouflage of uniform and music, oratory and popular cheering." [85] What results is a book that "has no bias of nationality and has blame for no one."[86]

Furthermore, the limited satirical titling of photographs in *The Horror of It* only serves to accentuate visible ethnic absences. Only with a well-trained eye can a viewer recognize the outline of the Austrian field hat in "Nooses," notice the non-standard weapon in his right hand, recognize the obscured Russian uniforms on the corpses in "On the wire," or identify the French corpse following two pages later in "Overtaken."[87] This aspect of Barber's approach is

far more intense compared to Friedrich's moderate identification of the victim subject and/or perpetrator's ethnicity. Rather than abandon military identification entirely, *War against War!* embraces a carnivalesque style, using satirical text to provoke disgust or contempt at a victim's ethnicity, or their lack of.[88] The most potent example is evident in the naked corpse [fig. 4.1, 5.1, and 5.2], which is repeatedly used as a powerful symbol to deconstruct race-related sympathies in Friedrich and Barber's publications. For Mikhail Bakhtin one of the most important functions of the grotesque was the act of degradation and debasement. He goes as far as to argue that any gaze on the lower part of a body, such as the "genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks," can fulfill this function.[89] "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously in order to bring forth something more and better."[90]

Figure 4.1

Figure 5.1

Figure 5.2

For Friedrich and Barber this "more and better" was the plight of humanity and their role as the war victim.[91] As a study by Dora Apel on Weimar war photography observes, Friedrich's visual strategy depended on the "humanist image of the suffering soldier as a universal subject."[92] The horrifying and the dualistic force of the grotesque served as a tool to expose an oppressive hegemonic identity whilst offering a system for social freedom,

destroy the idyllic of war whilst revealing a "truer" memory, and attack the valorization of the soldier in favor of a victimhood identity.

Part IV: Depoliticizing authority of victimhood

Engaging with a "perceived" non-agentive identity, victimhood has always claimed the capacity to exist outside of political discourse.[93] At the turn of the twenty-first century, as the proliferation of Holocaust studies has enveloped postmodern scholarship, the presumption of passive innocence in established victimhood identities has been questioned. Moreover, if victimhood rhetoric exists, as this study argues it does, how powerful is the claim to victimhood? With what powers can victimhood endow its victims? To answer the first of these questions, Laura Jeffery, in *Politics of Victimhood*, adopts a highly progressive argument where she assumes that narratives of extreme victimhood, such as the mutilated or suffering child, have the authority to anatomize political discourse. Like James Ferguson's "development," victimhood emerges as an "anti-politics machine…depoliticizing everything it touches."[94] Engaging with humanitarian ideals, victimhood has the capacity to exist "before" politics.[95] As such, "it poses itself as the neutral or indisputable starting point from which discussion, debates, and action—in a word, politics—can and must proceed."[96]

The power of the victimhood claim can also be recognized in its adopted historical condition. Discussed in literature as the "instrumentalist" approach, ethnic-orientated narratives are consistently used as the framework to mass mobilize people.[97] Unlike ethnic-orientated forms of collective memory, such as militarized, religious, and trauma-orientated memory, the legitimacy of victimhood identities stems from its *adopted* rather than *inherited* historical condition. In an analysis of victimhood discourse in an Israeli advertisement, Ochs declares that in victimization rhetoric "there is a specific focus on…the idea of an oppressor arising in every generation."[98] Whilst "perceived" historical genealogy is essential, the victim subject does not have to be ethnically or geographically related to the contemporary group in which it is employed.[99] For example, the victimhood discourse of the Holocaust narrative has found political and social influence for terror victims in Israel, racist violence against immigrants in Italy, and anti-fascism in Britain.[100] Even the children of Holocaust survivors are "transmitted" the victim status.[101] If successful, a victimhood status is not restricted by its geographic or ethnic origin and can be mobilized in a transnational space—anyone can be a victim.

Regarding the powers endowed by a legitimate victimhood claim, Jeffery demonstrates in her study of the Chagossian cultural "genocide"—the Chagossians were the original inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean before they were dispossessed from their territory in 1967 by the British government for American military use—the victim attracts active financial compensation and ideological sympathy.[102] The implications of the victim status are, in a manner, material. But as this study and other scholars

such as Ochs and Thomson have concluded victims are also active salient agents. They are consistently used to establish political legitimacy, mobilize commercial tactics, and destabilize established social order.[103] People instinctively associate the victim figure with a manifestation of trauma, exile and/or repression, endowing it with a sense of virtuous intent.[104] For example, post-mortem photographs of dead children or starved corpses [fig. 4.1, 5.1 and 5.2] are presumed innocent and will always establish a victimhood claim that entices sympathy and dominates political and social discourse.[105]

It is difficult—even impossible—for any analysis to depict the absurdity that *War against War!* or *The Horror of It* achieve on their own. However, to those who ask, Friedrich's grandson shares a personal memory of a visit to his grandfather when he was sixteen that echoes the fantasy that his grandfather aspired to:

> He said, "we would found an academy of peace on this island together…he convinced me, he was very convincing you see, young people from all over the world would come. We would educate them about peace. We would make peace together…then they would return to their homes. Then there would be peace in all countries and among all men."[106]

Even in his elderly years, after witnessing the atrocity of the world wars, Friedrich believed that the dominating hegemonic structure of race could be rejected by a victim status. Amplified by the awesome authority of the grotesque form and its enduring ability to mobilize horror, Friedrich and Barber crafted a victimhood identity with no established series of boundaries.

Though this undefined condition is able to provoke with ruthless force, it is also a highly volatile and unbalanced form of memory. In a review of Rebecca Clifford's *Commemorating the Holocaust*, Roberta Pergher summarizes that these kinds of undefined social adoptions create an "artificial commemoration that sideline(s) the 'embodied memory' of survivors" for a new victimhood affiliation in later generations.[107] This focus on any singular memory results in a biased commemoration that rejects inconsistent forms of memory.[108] For example, in the process of emphasizing the indiscriminate nature of war, Barber neglects the fact that the casualties of the Armenian Genocide contribute the largest portion of grotesque civilian dead in his publication. Similarly, Friedrich's brutal condemnation of the wealthy reduces a complex collection of individuals to a categorized group. Not only does it foster a clearly unbalanced form of memory, radical or extreme claims to victimhood can be counterproductive to the original intention of the activist. The risk that Friedrich and Barber's plea for peace is lost in the extreme claim for victimhood is remarkably real.

In 2014, Rod Tweedy's review of *War against War!* reflected on the risk that Friedrich's aggressive stance was so extreme it could succumb to an alternative cycle of "deception and victimisation."[109] Effectively, the institution

of the victim and perpetrator is so deeply engrained in the human psyche that even Friedrich and Barber never sought to uproot it. They sought only to reconstruct it:

> The war against war signifies:
> The war of the victimised against the profiteers!
> The war of the deceived against the deceivers!
> The war of the oppressed against the oppressors!
> The war of the tortured against the torturers!
> The war of the hungry against the well-fed![110]

Conclusion

Yet, as this study has revealed the dichotomous boundaries of victimhood frameworks are not necessarily limiting. In fact, the extraordinary unifying potential of victimhood that is exposed by Friedrich and Barber's publications challenges the reductive association often attributed to collective identities.[111] Empowered by the grotesque's capacity to juxtapose discordant aesthetics, depict extreme visualizations of horror, terrorize an individual's morality, negate ethnic orientated constructs, and degrade existing historical memories and hegemonic frameworks, Friedrich and Barber produce an extraordinary piece of visual and literary power.

Notes

[1] Ernst Friedrich, *War against War!* Nottingham, England: Russell Press, 2014.
[2] Dora Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War," *New German Critique* 76 (1999): 51.
[3] Remarked by Frances Connelly, "Images gathered under the grotesque rubric include those that combine unlike things in order to challenge established realities or construct new ones; those that deform or de-compose things; and those that are metamorphic." See Frances S. Connelly, introduction to *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, ed. Frances S. Connelly (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.
[4] Ernst Friedrich, *War against War!* (Nottingham, England: Russell Press, 2014), 23.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 25.
[7] Winston Churchill's address at Oxford, as a guest of the Raleigh Club, on May 22, 1937 was recalled by Judge James Brown QC and referenced in Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill—the Wilderness Years: A Lone Voice Against Hitler in the Prelude to War* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 1981), 176; Adolf Hitler, "Address by Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of the Reich, before the Reichstag, September 1, 1939," 1939, speech, The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, accessed 16 January 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gp2.asp.
[8] Leanne Hunnings, "Between Victimhood and Agency: Nadia the Slave in Bulwer's *The Last Days of Pompeii*," in *Ancient Slavery and Abolition: From Hobbes to Hollywood*, ed.

Richard Alston, Edith Hall, and Justin McConnell (Online: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), 60.
[9] Alyson Manda Cole, *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 141.
[10] Peter Fingesten, "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42.4 (1984): 419.
[11] Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque: The Critical Idiom Series* (Methuen: New York: 1979), 58; Drew Halfmann and Michael P. Young, "War Pictures: The Grotesque as a Mobilising Tactic," *An International Quarterly* 15.1 (2010): 4.
[12] Susan Sontag, "A Critic at Large: Looking at War, Photography's View of Devastation and Death," *The New Yorker*, December 9, 2002, 83.
[13] Marco Portales, "Writing History: Subjective Authoritativeness," *New Literary History* 18.2 (1987): 461–3.
[14] Laura Jeffery and Matei Candea, "The Politics of Victimhood," *History and Anthropology* 17.4 (2006): 290, 294.
[15] Henrik Ronsbo and Steffen Jensen, "Introduction: Histories of Victimhood: Assemblages, Transactions and Figures," in *Histories of Victimhood*, eds. Steffen Jensen and Henrik Ronsbo (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 1, 10.
[16] Jeffery and Candea, "The Politics of Victimhood," 293–4; Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, introduction to S*ocial Suffering*, eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), x; Juliana Ochs, "The Politics of Victimhood and its Internal Exegetes: Terror Victims in Israel," *The Politics of Victimhood* 17.4 (2006): 362.
[17] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–110; Mark Olssen, *Materialism and Education* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 57; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 2003), xxix.
[18] Olssen, *Materialism and Education*, 57.
[19] Sontag, "Looking at War," 82; Claire Bowen, "War Pictures for Peace: Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War*," *Arts of War and Peace* 1.2 (2013): 58; Douglas Kellner, "Ernst Friedrich's Pacificist Anarchism," *Graduate School of Education and Information Studies*, accessed May 13, 2015, https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell20.htm; Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds," 49.
[20] For example, Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds"; "Ernst Friedrich (1894–1967)," *Anti Kriegs Museum*; Kellner, "Ernst Friedrich's Pacifist Anarchism."
[21] In 1929, Barber was also listed as the collector of a photographical collection on the American aviator Charles Augustus Lindbergh by Francis Trevelyan Miller, titled *Lindbergh: His Story in pictures [with 327 photographs collected by F. A. Barber].*
[22] John M. Kinder, *Paying with Their Bodies: American War and the Problem of the Disabled Veteran* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 233–7.
[23] Images from *War Against War!* Are published with permission from Mr. Tommy Spree, manager of the Anti-War Museum in Berlin, Germany and Mr. Friedrich's grandson. Images from *The Horror of It: Camera Record of War's Gruesome Glories* are in the public domain; copyright was not renewed in 1960 or 1961 per US Copyright Title 17.
[24] Though a concurrent study has not been directly undertaken the similarities between *The Horror of It* and *War against War!* have been compared by some scholars. Notably,

John M. Kinder briefly discusses Friedrich and Baber's similarities within a larger body of work on the sufferings of the American Veteran. See John M. Kinder, *Paying with Their Bodies*, 233–7.

[25] Ernst Friedrich, *War against War!* (Nottingham, UK: Spokesman, 2014), 21.

[26] Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (UK: Clarendon Press, 1965), 6.

[27] Maria Haar, "The Phenomenon of Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction: Some Aspects of its Form and Function" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Umea, 1983).

[28] Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque: The Critical Idiom Series* (Methuen: New York: 1979), 28.

[29] Lily Campbell, "The Grotesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning" (Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1906).

[30] Samuel T. Coleridge, "The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," vol. 1, ed. Henry N. Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1836), 166.

[31] Fingesten, "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque," 429.

[32] Irene Rima Makaryk, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approached, Scholars, Terms* (Canada: University of Toronto, 1995), 85–6; Halfmann and Young, *War Pictures*, 3; Joyce Carol Oates, *Tales of the Grotesque* (New York: Dutton, 1994), 303; Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 31–2; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 33.

[33] Geoffrey Glat Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), xxi.

[34] For example, Ralf E. Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 2004), 4–13; Agata Krzychylkiewicz, "Towards the Understanding of the Modern Grotesque," *Journal of Literary Studies* 19.2 (2003): 209–17; Istvan Czachesz, *Grotesque Body in Early Christian Discourse: Hell, Scatology, and Metamorphosis* (Great Britain, Acumen: Co. Durham, 2012), 1–3; Mary J. Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (Oxon, Great Britain: Routledge, 2009), 3–10; Thomas Odell Haakenson, "Grotesque Visions: Art, Science, and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth Century Germany" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2006), 1–9; Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 33.

[35] Justine D. Edwards and Rune Granulund, *Grotesque* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 3; Shun-Liang Chao, "Rethinking the Concept of the Grotesque: Crawshaw, Baudelaire, and Magritte," *Studies in Comparative Literature* 22 (2010): 4–5, 8.

[36] Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 27*;* Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 58.

[37] The scholar Ruskin argues that a literary or artistic source that includes a grotesque aesthetic but is lacking a conceptual equivalent may still be categorized as a "false" or "symbolic" grotesque. See analysis of Ruskins, *The Stones of Venice* in Edwards and Graulund's, *Grotesque*, 17–22.

[38] Fingesten, "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque," 419–26.

[39] Bowen, "War Pictures for Peace," 60.

[40] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 93.

[41] Ibid, 25–6.

[42] Ibid, 133.

[43] Frederick Barber, *The Horror of It: Camera Records of War's Gruesome Glories*, abridged edition (New York: Association Press, 1932), "Birds."

[44] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 122–3.
[45] Barber, *The Horror of It*, "Only a Boche."
[46] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 26
[47] Otto Dix, "*Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume) [Verwundeter (Herbst 1916, Bapaume)]* from *The War [Der Krieg]*," etching and aquatint, Museum of Modern Art, 1924,
http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A1559&page_number=84&template_id=1&sort_order=1.
[48] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 86.
[49] Otto Dix, "A Dying Soldier (Sterbender Soldat) from *The War [Der Krieg]*," etching, aquatint, and drypoint, Museum of Modern Art, 1924, http://www.moma.org/collection_ge/object.php?object_id=87743
[50] Juliana Kreinik, "The Canvas and the Camera in Weimar Germany" (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2008), 99.
[51] Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capitalism," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 445.
[52] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 50–1.
[53] Dora Apel describes this feature as "rhetoric versus reality dialectic." Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds," 55.
[54] Connelly, *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, 2. Also see Chao, *Rethinking the Concept of the Grotesque*, 10.
[55] Halfmann and Young, "War Pictures."
[56] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 20.
[57] Barber, *The Horror of It*, "God's Challengers" and "Only a Boche."
[58] Bernd Ulrich cited in Kreinik, *The Canvas and the Camera in Weimar Germany*, 101.
[59] Kinder, "Paying with Their Bodies," 237; Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds," 57.
[60] Newspaper report by the Young People's Socialist League of America cited in Kinder, *Paying with Their Bodies*, 237.
[61] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 227.
[62] An analysis on the ethical dilemmas in the grotesque literary genres by Majumdar can be applied with equal effect to visual forms, and stresses that the grotesque must threaten "familiar pleasure and demand a renegotiation of aesthetic assumptions." See Gaurav Majumdar, "Jolting the Grotesque: Aesthetics and Ethics in 'The Satanic Verses,'" *Substance* 38.3 (2009): 31–59. A review by Rod Tweedy on *Veterans for Peace* in 2014 observed that, "looking at them [Ernst's *War against War!*] becomes a bit like losing one's moral compass." Rod Tweedy, "How We see War," review of *War against War!*, by Ernst Friedrich, Veterans for Peace, June 20, 2014, http://veteransforpeace.org.uk/2014/how-we-see-war-by-rod-tweedy/
[63] Fingesten, *Delimitating the Grotesque*, 422; Haar, "The Phenomenon of Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction," 49. Photographs in Friedrich's *War against War!* that clearly depict corpses without heads or vice versa include: 51, 74, and 227. Additionally, a second publication by Friedrich in 1926 also includes a photograph of four decapitated prisoners and their smiling Eastern executioners titled, "Auch die Farbigen Rassen haben 'Christliche' Kultur angenommen [Also the coloured races have taken on the Christian culture]." In Barber's work a photograph labeled "Decapitated" pictures a decapitated corpse whose exposed neck is jammed against the side of a trench.
[64] Connelly, introduction, 7.

[65] Barber, *The Horror of It*, front page.
[66] Said, *Orientalism*, 14.
[67] Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial (*Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 96. On Israel-Palestine see Ochs, "The Politics of Victimhood and its Internal Exegetes."
[68] Haar, "The Phenomenon of Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction," 59.
[69] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 23.
[70] A. D. Coleman, *The Grotesque in Photography* (New York: Ridge Press/Summit Books, 1977), 1–11.
[71] Craig Thompson, "A Carnivalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption or Grotesque Realism and the Analytics of the Excretory Economy," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 6.1 (2007): 119.
[72] Ibid, 115. Also see Connelly, *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, 8.
[73] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 140; Thomas Odell Haakenson, *Grotesque Visions: Art, Science, and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth Century Germany* (Online: Proquest, 2006), 9. Also see Haakenson, *Grotesque Visions*, 9.
[74] In the introduction to *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, Connelly observes the same capacity of the grotesque in Otto Dix's work, arguing that it is able to "challenge the boundaries of propriety in order to attack the nationalism that created this result"; Connelly, *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, 8.
[75] Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century* (California: University of California Press, 2010), 201–2; Jeremy Black and Donald M. Macraild, *Studying History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 66–7.
[76] Ina Markova, "Balancing Victimhood and Complicity in Austrian History Textbooks: Visual and Verbal Strategies of Representing the Past in Post Waldheim Austria," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 3.2 (2011): 60.
[77] Barber, *The Horror of It*, not applicable.
[78] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 201.
[79] For discussion on repressive grotesque form see Majumdar, "Jolting the Grotesque," 35–6.
[80] Karen McCluskey (Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Notre Dame, Australia), in discussion, August 17, 2015.
[81] Other photograph genres such as macabre and visualizations of extreme violence are certainly capable of undermining hegemonic structures, however their capacity to mobilize falls short.
[82] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 164.
[83] Alterity refers to the state of being "other." It is the identity that is in contrast to the self and is used to construct differences through hegemonic frameworks such as class, gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity.
[84] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 20.
[85] Collins, "'The Horror of It,'" 3.
[86] Barber, *The Horror of It*, foreword by Harry Emerson Fosdick.
[87] Brad Manera (Senior Historian at ANZAC Memorial), "Barber's 'The Horror of It,'" in discussion, May 19, 2015, Sydney. Transcripts.
[88] On carnivalesque refer to Mikhail Bakhtin, *Ravelais and His World.*
[89] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21.

[90] Ibid.
[91] This is notably different from contemporary and even other 20th century war photograph publications that consistently attempt to highlight and label ethnicity and its associated "otherness." This mode of identification is widely attributed to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, first published in 1978.
[92] Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds," 49, 54.
[93] Jeffery and Candea, "The Politics of Victimhood," 289.
[94] James Ferguson, *The Anti Politics Machine*, quoted in Laura Jeffery, "Victims and Patrons: Strategic Alliances and the Anti-Politics of Victimhood among Displaced Chagossians and their Supporters," *History and Anthropology* 17.4 (2006): 297, 297–312.
[95] Jeffery and Candea, "The Politics of Victimhood," 289.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 54–5.
[98] Ochs, "The Politics of Victimhood and its Internal Exegetes," 360.
[99] Ibid, 359.
[100] Ibid; Alana Lentin, *Racism and anti-racism in Europe* (London, Pluto Press, 2004), 13, 232.
[101] Hannah Starman, "Generation of Trauma: Victimhood and the Perpetuation of Abuse in Holocaust Survivors," *The Victims of Politics* 17.4 (2006): 329–30.
[102] It is important to recognize that the forced relocation of the Chagossian people remains a subject of controversy and has not been formally recognized as a genocide. Jeffery, "The Victims and Patrons," 309.
[103] Ochs, "The Politics of Victimhood and its Internal Exegetes," 357–9; Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 58.
[104] Jill E. Twark, *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 203.
[105] See Daniel Bar-Tal, Lily Chernyak, Noa Schori, and Ayelet Gundar, "A Sense of Self-Perceived Collective Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts," *International Review of the Red Cross* 91.874 (2009): 232; Rainer Strobl, "Constructing the Victim: Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Examples," *International Review of Victimology* 11.2–3 (2004): 300.
[106] Tommy Spree, interview with the author, June 2015. Friedrich was counter-cultural and as a result experienced immense persecution during and after the Second World War, including the destruction of his Museum and criminal convictions. His grandson accounts that in his older years Friedrich owned an island North of England where he would often reside to escape persecution.
[107] Roberta Pergher, "The Virtues of Victimhood—Contemporary uses of Holocaust Memory," review of *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy*, by Rebecca Clifford, *H-Net Reviews in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2014, http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=40885
[108] Emily Gallagher, "The First Casualty When War Comes is 'Truth': Neglected Atrocity in First World War Memory," *History in the Making* 4.1 (2015): 60.
[109] Tweedy, "How We see War."
[110] Friedrich, *War against War!*, 25.
[111] Said, *Orientalism*, xxviii.

Mystical Horror: Apophasis, Self-Subversion, and the Ligottian Universe

Brad Baumgartner
The Pennsylvania State University

Thomas Ligotti has achieved a considerable cult following in the genre of weird fiction, a circle that utilizes pulp magazines, fan-zines, anthologies, and story collections to disseminate material to readers, critics, and fan fiction writers, all who share in a taste for supernatural horror. Despite his prominence in the genre, Ligotti's career is an irregular one. For more than twenty years, from 1979 to 2001, he worked in Detroit as an editor of literary reference books, writing most of his material, much like Franz Kafka did, while attending to the daily trials and tribulations of the white-collar forty-hour work week. His work does not rely on the use of monsters or violence; the horror it invokes is more akin to the gothic tale of Edgar Allan Poe than to the modern realism of Stephen King, and yet there is a surreal element to Ligottian fiction that can bewilder even the most avid reader of Lovecraft.[1] Like Kafka, Ligotti's personal experience of the world is enshrouded in absurdity. Early in his career, he avoided major publication outlets, publishing in pamphlets and magazine special issues, until 1985 when his collection *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* was issued by Harry O. Morris in the form of a 300-copy edition. Since that time, Ligotti has continued to publish in magazines and journals but has released several other collections including *Grimscribe* (1991), *Noctuary* (1994), *My Work is Not Yet Done* (2002), *Teatro Grottesco* (2006), and a work of non-fiction entitled *The Conspiracy of the Human Race* (2010), a pessimistic work of pulp philosophy that proffers a horrifying vision of reality. It is for the "extreme darkness of his philosophical vision,"[2] dutifully expressed in his writing as nightmarish and eccentric commentaries on reality, that he has become known. And yet, paradoxically, for a long time, what was known of him amongst his admirers was quite little.

At a time when the traditional novel reigns supreme, he shuns it in favor of the short story narrative, giving his readers glimpses into an extreme logic of negation, discoursing on a darkness that acts as both a trope and a mode that permeates his work. Ligotti holds deep pessimistic convictions and deploys the short story narrative to develop commentaries on reality that are philosophically bent. His short stories do not fit into the conventional narratives that often circumscribe the corpus of twentieth-century horror fiction or even the subgenre of "weird fiction." Like H. P. Lovecraft, Ligotti undermines prevalent modern Western discourse in order to present pessimistic narrative theses, which comment upon the decay of the individual. But whereas Lovecraft's stylistic break utilizes the short story to reveal continually the intense realism of the human being when each narrator is faced with the unknown monstrosities of the *Outside*, Ligotti's writing style allows his narrators, in a way that guides readers through weird tales that deviate from even the harbingering of Lovecraft, to call into question normative visions of reality. Ligotti's version of weird fiction allows him to present a gap between the thinkable and the unthinkable in which the characters themselves are representative of this disjunction. He employs a fragmented, or commentary-like, narrative style in opposition to the novel, which uses entirety as a means to uphold itself.[3]

In an interview with E. M. Angerhuber and Thomas Wagner, he proclaims H. P. Lovecraft's influence to be an active and persistent agent in his own writing philosophy, one that negates even the thought of an "all-consuming darkness," stating, "I don't want a universe in which even nothing is going on."[4] Here Ligotti identifies with a writing philosophy his contemporaries have not yet seen, one predicated on the negation of even universal negation. Ligotti's narrator in "The Voice in the Bones," for instance, suggests that non-being, different from the way that it is typically characterized by "fearful thought," is a joyous condition.[5] This is not to suggest that each narrator serves as a philosophical soundboard, but to suggest that, as a writer who maps out a new space for speculating on the *really real* vis-à-vis notions of the unreal,[6] Ligotti exhibits a literary style that is also a mode of philosophical speculation. His philosophical worldview is proffered through the genre of supernatural horror fiction, but although a deep link to the Lovecraftian tradition exists, he is disinclined to see himself working entirely within it:

> My aim is the opposite of Lovecraft's. He had an appreciation for natural scenery on earth and wanted to reach beyond the visible in the universe. I have no appreciation for natural scenery and want the objective universe to be a reflection of a character.[7]

Although he pays homage to his predecessor, he remains an aberration, offering an entirely new brand of horror fiction altogether.

Readers of Ligotti frequently confront characters that are devoid of speech, abandoned, and emblematic of a grotesque kenosis, or self-emptying, in which "there are no people, nothing at all like that."[8] As such, Ligotti takes literary steps to obscure mystically the distinction between self and world. He writes about a fictional world superimposed onto an occulted world, but it is an occulted world whose hiddenness is its very manner of suspension. Enshrouded in a darkness that not only blackens but, through blackening, becomes luminous, Ligotti's short stories hold a close relation to medieval darkness mysticism.[9] In "The Eternal Mirage," for instance, Ligotti metaphorically describes the cartography of a universe where "illusions struggle with illusions," where blackness spreads above and below into "an endless ebony plateau whose surface is polished like stone," where "one may see the flickering of…luminous motes, quivering bodies held captive in the unbroken web of blackness."[10] He writes of this infinite space that "there, in that landscape, a dimension has died, annihilating depth and leaving behind only a lustrous image which seems to float far and wide upon the infinite surface of a black ocean."[11] For the wanderers of this place, this blackness paradoxically evokes sight as the site of the mirage itself, hence the blackened vision of the "lustrous image" that shines into a black sea of infinity.

Despite much excellent work on mysticism, literature, and philosophy in their respective fields, scholars have not yet fully explored the importance of viewing these traditions in an interdisciplinary context. Moving alongside recent interdisciplinary scholarship[12] that speculatively reconsiders the way one might understand reality and our relationship (or lack thereof) to it, this essay will investigate the possibility and necessity of considering these three distinct and historically diverse traditions in relation to one another. Hence, by implicating readers in a writerly aporia in which these three seemingly distinct traditions simultaneously attract and negate one another, Ligotti's work helps us to expand our understanding of genre horror precisely because it strives to speculatively open the rational to the unreasonable, that is, conjures ways to think about the unthinkable.

Ligottian horror fiction is path-breaking in the sense that, through his peculiar logic of negation, he creates an implicit commentary on the horror of reality, which put another way, is the paradoxical horror of realizing humanity's immanent alienation from the universe and its absolute unreality. In other words, for Ligotti, absolute unreality serves as the modern analog to the medieval mystic's "divine" or God-consciousness. Ligotti thus transforms the supernatural realism perfected by Lovecraft into an un-realism dominated by an immanence in which the Real is always already unreal. "It is not, in the end," writes S. T. Joshi, "a replacement of the real world by the unreal, but a sort of turning the real world inside out to show that it was unreal all along."[13]

By introducing these traits to the genre, Ligotti unveils the "ultimately peculiar and ultimately ridiculous qualities that are immanent and absolute in all existence."[14]

In *Noctuary*,[15] for instance, we find a section, "Notebook of the Night," that is composed of nineteen vignette pieces—brief, diary-like entries that are woven together by themes such as abyssal darkness and humanity's alienation from the universe. Let us take, for example, "One May Be Dreaming," a short piece that gives readers a snapshot glimpse into the obscure, oneiric state of being that the narrator finds himself in:

> There can be no doubt that my present state is without reality. If nothing else, I know what it is like to dream. And although a universe of strange sensation is inspired by those lights beyond the window, by the fog and the graveyard, they are no more real than I am. I know there is nothing beyond those lights and that the obscured ground outside could never sustain my steps. Should I venture there I would fall straight into an absolute darkness, rather than approaching it by the degrees of my dying dreams.[16]

Bewildered by his own unreality, the narrator remains at the brink of thinking the light's beyond. His Oneness with absolute darkness is limited by the obscure beyondness of the light, one that may or may not be as real as he thinks himself to be. Oneirism[17] is the ontological medium he uses to intuit this limitation. He sits, seen by the invisible unreality, pondering whether or not to venture into the absolute darkness, but only capable of narrating his present state as being mediated by his dying dreams.

Being that the horror of darkness is both a trope and a mode for Ligotti, we can come to understand it as a unique aspect of his writing, especially as an authorial (or autobiographical) impetus that acknowledges a constant self-fashioning and artistry. Not only does he find in human perception our plight—for we will never attain absolute realization—we find even more fodder for horror, of horrors incomprehensible. In an immanent state of nocturnal eternity, or *noct(e)rnity*, like the one he imagines, there is nothing to wake up to, and even if there were, it lies beyond the depths of consciousness itself. As such, Ligotti's formulation above holds a generically traditional mystical insight, in that the dreamer cannot wake up, that waking up always necessarily pertains to an order eluding the parameters of consciousness. His work depicts a world where "figures parade in a state of terror which is immortal, unchanging, and which endures, through all the phases of the fateful ordeal, as their only inviolable birthright,"[18] and subsequently posits a discourse to depict such eternal suffering, one founded in the void. And so it is to a mode of discourse born of the void that we can now turn our attention.

A Peculiar Apophasis

In his two-volume anthology entitled *What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature and the Arts* (2007),[19] William Franke theoretically frames apophasis, the mystical language of no-saying, as both a mode of discourse and a genre. By tracing its usage beginning with Platonic and Neoplatonic commentaries, moving through a corpus of medieval mysticisms, and into its post-medieval usage in modern poetry and philosophy, he notes that the apophatic tradition maintains a vested interest in discoursing on the ineffable. Modern horror fiction, in the tradition of supernatural or "weird fiction" initiated by H. P. Lovecraft and, more recently, in the work of Ligotti, deploys a peculiar use of negation in narrative language. Unlike traditional mystics, horror writers do not seek union with the divine. Horror fiction does, however, deploy apophatic techniques in order to describe negatively the indescribable. Ligotti's work, though a modern literary form and with its emphasis on darkness, void, and emptiness of self, thus holds a closer relation to medieval texts, namely those found within the traditions of apophatic mysticism or negative theology, than to most twentieth-century weird fiction.[20] Thus, by examining the works of mystics of the apophatic tradition against the literary heresies of Ligotti's modern horror, we are able to show how modern horror utilizes and subsequently alters apophatic discourse.

On the surface, the shortness of Ligotti's horror stories bears a resemblance to philosophical commentary. We can also suggest, however, that the shortness of his stories bears importance in its relation to mysticism. There is the relation, for instance, to epigrammatic thought, i.e. the narrative-epigram, which is often found in mystical auto-commentary, writing that allows the mystic to at once think about and discourse on their mystical experience. Auto-commentaries of this sort are not only formally short but also call into question other meanings of shortness—of life, of time itself vis-à-vis eternity—that are of significance for mystical horror. Julian of Norwich, for example, writes of the traditional mystical connection between bodily illness and the experience of divine presence. On her sickness, she writes, "I felt as if the upper part of my body were beginning to die. My hands fell down on either side, and I was so weak that my head lolled to one side. The greatest pain that I felt was my shortness of breath and the ebbing of my life."[21] Julian's mystical experience of bodily anguish, i.e. her shortness of breath and of life itself, suggests a connection between imminence and fear, the terror of what is *about to happen* any second now.

For Ligotti, the brevity of the short form mirrors a similar emphasis between imminence and fear. The lack of context within his short stories evokes the terror of trying to communicate the dark precepts of a reality that is essentially incommunicable. Likewise, for medieval darkness mystics such as

Dionysius the Areopagite and John of the Cross, poetry and apophatic language address the implicit and bewildering issue of trying to express the inexpressibility of achieving divine union. As William Franke notes, since the Middle Ages, apophaticism has functioned as a mode of discourse primarily in literary and philosophical fragments written by the likes of Holderlin, Rilke, Kafka, Kierkegaard, and others—modern writers who find themselves writing about things that cannot be said. Franke writes,

> Just as for mystic writers, who typically cannot define what they believe in or desire, so for apophatic writers the sense of their belief in…what they can neither know nor say nevertheless permeates all that they do say and write.[22]

Moreover, in *Language and Death*, Giorgio Agamben examines the relation between language and death that Martin Heidegger once posited but did not fully explore in order to investigate the ungroundedness of being, for "as much as being takes place in the nonplace of the foundation (that is, in nothingness), being is the ungrounded (das Grundlose)."[23] This ungroundedness also serves as the dwelling place for the language deployed by medieval apophatic mystics who discourse on the nature of the Absolute. These mystics, as living beings, have language. But on an ungrounded ground they are double beings, incapable of knowing the totality of the divine that they seek, and yet capable of deploying speech. The language they use, mystical utterances that say without fully knowing, attends to the paradox of such double being: because they are conscious beings, they cannot know the consciousness of absolute being. So the voice they use is the negative of what is actually speak-able; they speak without speaking about the actual object of their thought. This speech is the mystical dimension of the negative, or, to be more accurate, as Agamban puts it, "the mystical is nothing but the unspeakable foundation."[24] For apophatic mystics, the ontological dimension is connected to the divine dimension through language,[25] but the object of their thought cannot be grasped through language.

In a similar fashion, the logic of negation found in the apophatic tradition also surfaces as a mode of discourse in Ligottian narrative horror fiction. Yet, the peculiar logic of negation found in Ligotti's short stories is skewed to one side, yielding a modern, if not grotesque, form of apophatic discourse. In order to make this argument, we can look to "The Voice in the Bones," a short story that begins in the nightmarish setting of a Tower that is enigmatically and hermetically set between a higher and lower darkness. Contextually, this short story is enshrouded in enigma: an unnamed narrator tells the story of an unnamed man who is only specified by titles such as "Mr. Fizzle" and "Mr. Thump" by several disembodied voices that inhabit the Tower. The Tower, an intricately designed and abysmal place filled with shadows and echoes, is the

dwelling place of the unnamed man. Aside from these general markers, the narrator keeps things relatively unexplained. Ligotti thus casts this story in an air of mystery, vaguely plotting out the context of the unnamed man's stay at the Tower. Utilizing qualifying phrases such as "an interval of oblivion passed, and it was an entirely different room in which he awoke,"[26] Ligotti's narrator fails to describe the context of time (elapsed and at present), and alludes to the proclivity of what Benjamin Noys calls the "horror temporis"—"what Lovecraft suggests is the detachment of time from any relation to humanity"[27]—to create an ill-explained setting that is as weird as the events taking place within it. At the story's meontological climax, the unnamed man finds several scraps of paper amongst a pile of bones on the ground, the scribbles of which will help him to un-realize his own horrific being within the Tower. As he reads these words to himself, he hears them spoken through a voice in the bones.

With this, Ligotti principally insists on the failure of written words to represent accurately the experience of eternal union beyond oneself, but also, he shows the critical significance of the presence of writing as morbid or desiccated trace of the unpresent subject. The elliptical phrases the unnamed man finds on the scraps of paper dislodge the narrative logic of the story, creating implicit critiques on the shortcomings of written/oral speech and positive logic, in order to describe mystical union with "eternal blackness." In the following passage, the unnamed narrator describes the abyssal place that long housed the voice in the bones by piecing together fragmented modes of speech:

> He seemed to see phrases, incantations, formulae, and almost to hear them spoken by a shattered voice. *The pact of bones and blackness*, the voice declaimed. *The collection of shadows…shadows binding bones…skeletons becoming shadows*. And he came to understand things: *the land stripped of flesh…the reeking earth ripped clean and rising into the great blackness*. This reverberant discourse had made him its student, imparting theories and practice: *bones pummeled into purity…parts turned to brilliant particles…the shadows seeded with the voice of skulls…the many voices within eternal blackness…the tenebrous harmony*.[28]

The reverberant discourse—fragmented, negative, even pedagogical—schools the unnamed man in terms of esoteric content and is evocative of apophasis in terms of narrative form. This negative discourse, the semantic analog to mystical union with the great blackness, summons him *into* the great blackness—"now he was with them,"[29] writes Ligotti. Thus, he is not so much a third party, a conduit for union between the voice in the bones and the eternal blackness. Rather, he semantically partakes in his own stuttering union

with eternal blackness.[30] The fragmented discourse, as a failure of speech, becomes the site of apophatic perversion: despite its effort, the shattered, disembodied voice of the bones can only deliver the pact between bones (the body) and blackness (the eternal) via short utterances, failures of speech that impossibly hope to comprehend their own formulation.

If Ligotti's brand of horror fiction is, as we argue here, a form of linguistic trauma, or, rather, if in this description of mystical union with eternal blackness we find a failure of speech, then what is really found in such discourse is an apophatic a-theology. But to make this claim, we must first arrive at an etymological explanation of what a "negative theology" means. Denys Turner notes,

> If we attend to the Greek etymology of the word theology, then a curious state of linguistic affairs results from its combination with the word apophatic. For theology means "discourse about God" or "divine discourse," so the expression "apophatic theology" ought to mean something like: "that speech about God which is a failure of speech." And, though more than a little paradoxical…this definition rather precisely captures the Dionysian understanding of it.[31]

On the contrary, for us, the expression of an apophatic *atheology* would mean something like: "that speech about the absence of God which is a failure of speech." In this way, the Ligottian discourse on blackness seeks to blacken absolutely. Albeit strange, Ligotti's narrative focus on attaining union with an "eternal blackness" in lieu of *God* is a narrative horror feature that demonstrates that the hiddenness of unreality is an illusion, becoming the inverted analog to a darkness mysticism[32] of pure annihilation.

Ligotti's short stories, marked by a mystical desire to provide a fictitious yet apophatic discourse on our unreality, become the literary representation of a world in a post-Nietzschean—for God is long since dead—and, thus, post-transgressional framework largely characterized by the uncanny, affectlessness, puppets, ruined factories, masks, and nightmares. Consequently, his work posits an un-grounded pessimo-mysticism, a negative and indexical mode of discourse carefully designed to invoke the very darkness it describes. As such, what readers encounter is less of a worldview and more of a modern, skewed form of apophasis designed to speak about the absolute elements of unreality, evoking a stark sense of dread.

On Self-Subversion

Another implicit factor in Ligotti's mystical horror is the critique of a particularly modern experience, namely that experiencing oneself existentially

as a self is an illusion. Horror tends to subvert and interrogate the foundational binaries of culture and language, problematizing the relations between self and other, animate and inanimate, and being and thinking.[33] This notion is evidenced in "In a Foreign Town, In a Foreign Land," a short story which, in part, communicates the tale of the *uncreation* of Ascrobius, a contemplative freak whose physical maladies are only marginally understood by the town physician, Dr. Klatt. As a metaphysician, however, Dr. Klatt is eventually able to speculate that Ascrobius's contemplative powers allow him literally to *uncreate* himself from existence. As such, the townsfolk witness not the disappearance of a self but the absolute negation of a self on both physical and spiritual planes. What this critique of modern experience allows for is not an anachronistic superimposition of John of the Cross's metaphor of the spiritual "dark night," but rather a literary method of utilizing the theme of purgative contemplation to present a mystical way of viewing modern selfhood as a concept that is intrinsically flawed. Each author posits a type of self-emptying,[34] though each type varies in terms of method and object.

For John of the Cross, purgative contemplation, "which causes in [the] soul the negation of herself and of everything,"[35] is a kind of self-emptying, an obscure "dark night" in which the soul detaches from all illusions that are not God. It is this metaphysical act of contemplation as an act of freakishness that Ligotti provides readers with a model of the modern self as one traumatized. Ligotti writes that Ascrobius's freakish qualities emerged from his intensely contemplative nature.

> "He had incredible powers available to him," said the doctor. "He might even have cured himself of his diseased physical condition; who can say? But all of his powers of contemplation, all of those incessant *meditations* that took place in his high backstreet house, were directed towards another purpose altogether."[36]

Ligotti situates the act of mystical contemplation within the context of the horror of Being, to expunge Ascrobius of the desire *to be* at all, to detach the copula—that Ascrobius *is*—from any coupling with his name:

> Eventually someone did inquire about the contemplative powers and meditations of the recluse, and toward what end they might have been directed. "What Ascrobius sought," the doctor explained, "was not a remedy for his physical disease, not a cure in any usual sense of the word. What he sought was an absolute *annulment*, not only of his disease but of his entire existence. On rare occasions he even spoke to me," the doctor said, "about the *uncreation* of his whole life."[37]

The use of purgative contemplation to *annul* absolutely an entire existence is a kind of mystical self-emptying that, when contextualized within Ligotti's larger narrative project of touching on the ineffable, is a paradox that is expressed poetically through the short story narrative.[38]

This key element of self-annulment that arises in Ligotti's brand of mystical horror is also evidenced in the relationship, proposed by James Trafford, between his horror fiction and the work of philosopher Thomas Metzinger. This relationship is unique in its treatment of the self as an illusion, in positing a discourse about abandoning the notion of modern selfhood. Metzinger's appeal to eliminate selves marks a radical departure from epistemology, proposing "to eliminate selves from the ontological horizon and to destroy our most cherished 'originary' institutions about 'ourselves' and our place in the world."[39] To abandon the notion of selfhood in the modern world is an intuitive and radical view to take, but it is also a view that can be read as being historically conditioned, having not only ontological but also epistemological underpinnings.

The notion of the abandonment of self as a practice performed by an individual who has self-consciousness can be traced first and foremost to the tradition inaugurated by the sixth-century mystic and theologian commonly referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius or Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius writes that "by an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is."[40] Dionysius also negates the opposite of selfhood, which is especially important for the possibility of eternal individuality, in his formulation of "being neither oneself nor someone else."[41] This divinely radical individuality is significant in the tradition of Western mysticism, as it stresses an essential alienness that places one, as Meister Eckhart expresses, "before" God, and is exposed when one begins to see the self as foreignness.[42] Dionysius's writings emphasized the Neoplatonic doctrines of the unity of God and of privative evil and endeavored to show how to account for knowledge of God. In *The Divine Names*, Dionysius delineates two primary ways to know God. The affirmative way validates attributes of the divine, while the negative way knows through "unknowing":

> The most divine knowledge of God is
> One which knows through unknowing
> in the unity beyond intellect
> when the intellect stands away from beings
> and then stands away from itself,
> it is united to the more than resplendent rays,
> and is then and there illumined
> by the inscrutable depths of wisdom. [43]

Via such mystical utterances, Dionysius practices the negative way to know God in order to deny poetically any predication of God's characteristics that apply to human beings, who were commonly referred to as creatures[44] in the Christian theology of the Middle Ages.

This logic of negation, in which knowledge of God is undergone through unknowing, is characteristic of the "self-subverting utterance," a term coined by Denys Turner to define "the utterance which first says something and then, in the same image, unsays it."[45] In Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, a mystical text that first develops a discourse of apophatic dialectics focused on "divine darkness," self-subverting utterances, in which "the divine light is a 'brilliant darkness'; the 'mysteries of God's word' are uttered in a 'hidden silence,'"[46] abound, as do metaphors such as divine shadows, unknowing, ineffability, and the abandonment of speech and thought that will become tropes for the tradition. The text functions as the progenitor to a great lineage of Western Christian apophatic thought extending through the Middle Ages with Meister Eckhart, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John Scotus Eriugena, and John of the Cross, each of whom used the *via negativa* to counter the positive logic of cataphatic theology. *Mystical Theology*, centuries before Descartes develops his notion of *cogito ergo sum*, suggests that selfhood hinders the possibility of experiencing consciousness of the divine. The proto-epistemological misgivings about being a self, or, rather, as a being capable to individuate, accentuate a longing to "plunge into darkness," to move *beyond* individual being into him "that made his shadows his hiding place,"[47] into the divine darkness of God. As such, to plunge into the divine shadow, that place which, beyond all that can be made known to an individual self, is the aim of the absolute abandonment of self, in which any epistemological understanding of oneself as a self is abandoned in favor of being uplifted into absolute darkness.

Understood another way, the notion of "divine darkness" is used by medieval mystics working in the tradition of the *via negativa* who seek to develop a discourse predicated on the inability ever sufficiently to describe the nature of mystical union with the divine. In such instances, the divine, conceived in this view as a limit to thought, is ineffable; apophasis, then, identified by Michael Sells as "the language of unsaying,"[48] becomes the mode of manifestation or linguistic medium to demarcate such a limit to human thought. Dionysius the Areopagite's work is primary for the tradition and helps to contextualize apophatic discourse within the context of the individual. Regarding selfhood, Dionysius

> shatters the myth of individualism, which even in the sixth century was bound up with certain over-confidence in epistemological self-constitution, leading Dionysius to warn Timothy not to share the mystical secrets with those "who

> imagine that there is nothing beyond instances of individual being and who think that by their own intellectual resources they can have direct knowledge of him who has made shadows his hiding place." Such people weigh themselves down with themselves, too dazzled by the meager light of their own intellect to ascend to the divine darkness.[49]

Thus, negative language speaks away knowledge of God in such a way as to attain true knowledge of God. The self passes away, is annihilated, to be filled with divine knowledge.

A modern literary corollary to the theological self-subversion exemplified by apophatic mysticism and negative theology would have to hinge on not only a critique of the notion of modern existential selfhood but also on a complete rejection of the possibility of subjective experience. Trafford states, "Ligotti invokes the expropriation of subjective experience thus: 'There are no people, nothing at all like that, the human phenomenon is but the sum of densely coiled layers of illusion, each of which winds itself upon the supreme insanity that there are persons of any kind.'"[50] Hidden in Ligotti's work, then, rests a latent framework for evacuating subjective experience, one that unhinges from modern connotations of selfhood in order to reject them.[51]

The evacuation of subjectivity as such is suggested in Ligotti's story entitled "The Strange Design of Master Rignolo." In this story, the fallen protagonist Master Rignolo, an aged painter, inverts the notion of art as a form in favor of a perverse formlessness. He paints not individuals but landscapes, borderless territories that blur any relation between self and world:

> What I mean to say is that to inhabit my landscapes one must, in no figurative sense, grow into them. At best they are a paradise for sleepwalkers, but only those sleepwalkers who never rise to their feet, who forget their destination and who may thus never reach that ultimate darkness beyond dreams, but may loiter in perpetuity in these lands of mine, which neighbor on nothingness and stand next door to endlessness. So you see, my critics, what we have in these little pictures is a perpetual communion with the void, a vital annihilation…[52]

Much like Dionysius does, Rignolo uses the self-subverting utterance to enrich the paradox of his metaphors: he does not paint individuals, but one can "grow into" his paintings; it is a paradise for sleepwalkers, but only those who do not rise; "perpetual communion" and yet "vital annihilation." We have here a weird mysticism of the "darkness beyond dreams" wherein the self transmogrifies into a derelict, inorganic state.

Interestingly, it is not only Rignolo's mysticism, but also the way in which Ligotti writes *about* Rignolo's mysticism, including the first-person narrative and the abstract description of concrete creations, which suggest an inherent relation to Thomas Metzinger's position. Asserting that subjective existence is mere illusion, Metzinger "avers that it is 'practically impossible' for us to attain realization of our unreality due to inbuilt manacles of human perception that keep our minds in a dream state."[53] Rignolo's paintings, bearing titles like *Inorganic Universe* and *The Tract of Extinction*, it was said, "did not depict as much as suggest the promised subjects," obscuring the "vague hint of forms [that] might emerge here and there…a rejection of material being, an objection to presence and a devotion to absence."[54] The implication of art work as such is something like an inversion or negative mimesis in which one simultaneously sees in the work itself the non-presence of aesthetics and non-aesthetics of the present. That he mixes a waning materialism with the pursuit of voidic communion is important to note, for Rignolo himself is a mystic. There is also an implication that his paintings are not only a work of art but also art *work*; in other words, Rignolo's mysticism is a form of numinous labor, a cryptic mode of production by way of self-subversion. As this tale of inorganic horror nears its end, readers are met with an invocation of the ineffable, a vignette of silence or "scene which makes no sound,"[55] where Rignolo himself via a grotesque act of self-annihilation finds oneness with the landscape, captured in the bounds of unreality he once thought boundless, caught up in perpetual communion with obscurity.

Insofar as Ligotti appropriates apophatic discourse, he also perverts it. According to psychoanalytic historian Élisabeth Roudinesco, much of the mystical discourse that flourished between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries set a precedent for confronting the divine as unthinkable. She states that, "based upon a challenge to the idea that the unity of the world could be restored at the expense of the individual, the literature of mysticism therefore displays all the features of what it is fighting and postulates that 'The mystics were wrestling with the dark angel of mourning.'"[56] Thus, for Ligotti, the logic of negation is less an expression of the mystical sensibility to restore the world and more a speculatively medieval aesthetic that is capable of discerning—i.e. narrating—the modern world as unthinkable. This perversion of mystical discourse describes the inherently inconsistent nature of accessing the Real in our contemporary culture, attesting to a creative element specific to genre horror that performs the very paradoxical task that the medieval mystic's apophatic discourse once sought to display, namely that human consciousness itself can be a limit.

Notes

[1]Ben Woodard identifies a clear distinction between the two writers' brands of weird fiction: "Whereas Lovecraft's weirdness draws predominantly from the abyssal depths of the uncharted universe, Ligotti's existential horror focuses on the awful proliferation of meaningless surfaces that is, the banal and every day function of representation" ("Mad Speculation and Absolute Inhumanism: Lovecraft, Ligotti, and the Weirding of Philosophy," *continent* 1.1 [2011]: 4).

[2] Matt Cardin, "Liminal Terror and Collective Identity in Thomas Ligotti's 'The Shadow at the Bottom of the World'," in *The Thomas Ligotti Reader*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2003), 85.

[3] In stark contrast to the narrative conventions of the novel, which traditionally relies on length and totality to describe life, the short, fragmentary form of Ligotti's stories communicates the ultimate condition of ontological dissonance that genre horror sees in the world. This brevity evokes, as we will discuss below, a corollary readerly terror that focuses on life's shortness.

[4] Thomas Ligotti, "Disillusionment can be Glamorous: An Interview with Thomas Ligotti," in *The Thomas Ligotti Reader*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2003), 60.

[5] Thomas Ligotti, *Noctuary* (Burton: Subterranean Press, 2012), 147.

[6] Speculation like this that hinges upon the alternating dialectic of the real and the unreal is reminiscent of Lovecraft's constant use of the unreliable narrator. In "The Tomb" (1917), Lovecraft famously writes that "men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of super-sight which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism." *Eldritch Tales: A Miscellany of the Macabre* (New York: Orion, 2011), 93.

[7] Quoted in Woodard, 4.

[8] Thomas Ligotti, "I Have a Special Plan for This World." See: Marc Fisher, "Unplug Yourself." *k-punk* (blog), December 16, 2004, http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/004579.html.

[9] In his fiction, Ligotti uses several terms to qualify such blackness. Of note in the subsequent quotation are the adjectives he chooses to conjoin to the nouns—*shining* darkness to *lustrous* blackness—which become the mystical analog to the "luminous darkness" described by Dionysius the Areopagite in the *Mystical Theology*.

[10] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 195.

[11] Ibid., 196.

[12] See Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1*. Zero Books: Winchester, 2011.

[13] S.T. Joshi, "Thomas Ligotti: The Escape from Life," in *The Thomas Ligotti Reader*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2003), 139.

[14] Thomas Ligotti, *Teatro Grottesco* (London: Virgin Books Ltd., 2008), 51.

[15] For Ligotti, the term "noctuary" is akin to "nocturnal diary."

[16] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 162.

[17] Historically speaking, there has been a discrepancy between the kind of opaque and inescapable oneirism that Ligotti posits and what we could call "willed oneirism." The latter is perhaps best exemplified in the Samurai text *Hagakure*: "It is a good viewpoint to see the world as a dream. When you have something like a nightmare, you will wake up and tell yourself that it was only a dream. It is said that the world we live in is not a bit different from this." Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Scott Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2012), 82.
[18] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 191.
[19] William Franke, *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature and the Arts: Volume 2: Modern and Contemporary Transformations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
[20] We might note that H. P. Lovecraft's early "Dreamlands" stories were influenced by Dunsanian mysticism, in which dreamlike tales hovering between realism and fantasy were created. Ligotti draws influence from the scientifically modeled Lovecraftian *Outside*, a universe filled with alien life forms that exist just beyond the realm of human knowledge, but breaks tethers with that influence, inverting Lovecraft's scientific discourse of negation into a modern discourse on absence in which the Outside is transmuted into an inside that retains no mythos. As such, it is akin to an inversion of the Hermetic adage, "as above, so below" into "as without, so within."
[21] Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 128.
[22] Ibid., 4.
[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xiii.
[24] Ibid., 91.
[25] Ibid., 27.
[26] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 142.
[27] Benjamin Noys, "Horror Temporis," *Collapse: Journal of Philosophical Research and Development*, Vol. IV: Concept Horror (2008): 281.
[28] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 147. [Emphases in the original.]
[29] Ibid.
[30] In stanza seven of *The Spiritual Canticle*, John of the Cross writes of a similar mystical stuttering: "Y todos cuantos vagan / de ti me van mil gracias refiriendo, / y todos más me llagan, / y déjame muriendo / un no sé qué que queda balbuciando." *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. Washington: Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars, Inc.
[31] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.
[32] For Dionysius the Areopagite, darkness is a mysterious beyond, a negative site for a communion where one can "plunge into the darkness, where, as scripture proclaims, there dwells the One who is beyond all things." "*The Mystical Theology*," *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 136.
[33] Insofar as narrative fiction is a kind of storytelling that relays certain events that happen in life, it aims to meaningfully communicate experience to others. In this way, communication can be understood as the "glue" or adhesive that binds the self-world correlation. Horror fiction adds a new element to this narrative process, however,

because it problematizes the relation between being and thinking. In doing so, horror fiction dissolves the communicative glue and deteriorates the method of adhesion of the self-world correlation.

[34] Rudolf Otto maintains that "one of the chiefest and most general features of mysticism is […] *self-depreciation* […] the estimation of the self, of the personal 'I', as something not perfectly or essentially real, or even as mere nullity, a self-depreciation which comes to demand its own fulfillment in rejecting the delusion of selfhood, and so makes for the annihilation of self. And on the other hand mysticism leads to a valuation of the transcendent object of its reference as that which through plentitude of being stands supreme and absolute, so that the finite self contrasted with it becomes conscious even in its nullity that 'I am naught, Thou art all.'" *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 21.

[35] St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. Gabriela Cunninghame Graham (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), 7.

[36] Ligotti, *Teatro Grottesco*, 122.

[37] Ibid., 123.

[38] Following this logic of negation, we could suggest that horror fiction, being a fiction that is not the opposite of non-fiction, is rather a kind of grotesque poetry.

[39] James Trafford, "The Shadow of a Puppet Dance: Metzinger, Ligotti and the Illusion of Selfhood," *Collapse: Journal of Philosophical Research and Development*, Vol. IV: Concept Horror (2008): 185.

[40] Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite. "*The Mystical Theology*," *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135.

[41] Ibid., 137.

[42] Georges Bataille professes a similar mystical insight when he writes that "the essence of myself arises from this […] the feeling of my fundamental improbability situates me in a world where I remain as though foreign to it, absolutely foreign." *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State of New York Press, 1988), 69.

[43] Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *"The Divine Names." Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Forerest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 66–7.

[44] Cf. Saint Bonaventure's thirteenth-century mystical text: "We may behold God in the mirror of visible creation, not only by considering creatures as vestiges of God, but also by seeing Him in them; for He is present in them in His essence, His power, and His presence." *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 11.

[45] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 21.

[46] Ibid., 21.

[47] Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *The Divine Names,* 156.

[48] Michael T. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

[49] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology after Ontotheology," *Modern Theology* 19.3 (2003): 397.

[50] Trafford, "The Shadow of a Puppet Dance," 200.

[51] Such radical rejections of classical thought may be the result of horror's preoccupation with taboo interstices where cultural and linguistic systems fall apart.

For instance, horror critic Stephen Prince, following Edmund Leach, notes a similar collapsing of self and world in body horror films such as David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). He writes that "bodily products are universally tabooed because they are both 'me and not me,' confounding the initial boundary relation of self and world." "Dread, Taboo, and *The Thing*: Toward a Social Theory of the Horror Film," *The Horror Film*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 122.

[52] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 133.

[53] Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010), 106.

[54] Ligotti, *Noctuary*, 132.

[55] Ibid., 136.

[56] Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 12.

Book Review

Bourke, Joanna. *The Story of Pain: From Prayers to Painkillers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 396 pp.

This timely monograph begins by asking: "What is pain?" It is a seemingly simple question that Joanna Bourke rightly notes "is more difficult…than we might imagine."[1] It is also a question with which historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and clinicians have been wrestling for centuries. Most histories of that topic have assumed that anyone who claims to be in pain is indeed in pain. Bourke favors this method because it is pragmatic as well as anti-essentialist, even though it means that pain is treated as "an identifiable thing or concept."[2] If pain becomes an entity, it turns into an "independent agent," an assumption that can be found in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), which places pain outside language, as something private and inexpressible.[3] Bourke calls this "an extreme version of reification," because Scarry "has fallen into the trap of treating metaphoric ways of conceiving suffering […] as descriptions of an actual entity."[4] Instead of making pain an entity, Bourke proposes that we designate it as a "type of event" within someone's life-story.[5]

Bourke's study is a valuable contribution to pain studies, offering a broad, global perspective on the history of pain and yet delving into the details of language and metaphor surrounding the description of pain events. Treating pain as an event allows the historian to see pain as an activity that occurs within specific environmental and relational contexts.[6] This approach makes pain historically flexible and historically complex, acknowledging "being-in-pain" as "a multifaceted sensory, cognitive, affective, motivational, and temporal phenomenon."[7] Bourke seeks to avoid several scholarly traps, such as presentist tendencies, as well as debates pitting emotional pains against bodily pains (which are rooted in the Cartesian distinction between mind and body). Her definition of pain as an event remains neutral about the "truth value" of philosophical and scientific definitions, and instead asks what "the *content* of any particular, historically specific and geographically situated ontology tell[s]

us about the way philosophers, scientists, and physicians have sought to classify pain-events."[8]

Bourke focuses on the English-speaking world (the British Islands, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) since the eighteenth century, and while her anecdotal examples within individual chapters present a story of pain that spans the globe, Bourke is very aware of how much cultural perceptions (and ethnic minorities within these cultures) create diversity within a global history. Attuned to this array of responses, Bourke offers a "history of the interpretation of bodily experiences," which is why her chapters include much analysis of language employed by pain-sufferers.[9]

All of this conceptual material sets the stage for chapter two, "Estrangement," which explores the problems of "communicating painful sensations to oneself as well as to other people."[10] This chapter argues that pain-sufferers usually experience isolation through a disconnection between themselves and their body-in-pain. Because of the alienation to their own body, sufferers also often seek seclusion from others. Inherent within pain-narratives is a linguistic struggle to communicate the sensation to others. At the same time, communicated pain causes distress to listeners. Bourke suggests three possible explanations for why pain narratives are distressing to an audience: they "conjure up memories" in the lives of listeners that are painful; they stir the imagination of listeners in painful ways that exceed the reality of a situation; and finally, they elicit empathy through neural processes.[11] While pain can be an isolating experience, it can also create communities; as evidence, Bourke points to new shared arenas in social media and online communities that offer a way for people to communicate and become part of a community of sufferers who find validation and support.

Bourke's third chapter, "Metaphor," analyzes the process of finding words to express suffering. While forging metaphors to describe pain, people draw on "vast theological, medical, philosophical, and artistic traditions."[12] Explaining that figurative languages "are rhetorical figures of speech that employ association, comparison, or resemblance" through analogies, similes, and metonyms, Bourke analyzes the most frequently used metaphors for pain, particularly those that reify pain as a separate entity, rupture or rip apart the body, and link pain with temperature (usually heat).[13] Bourke wisely acknowledges the diversity of these metaphors, a diversity that is due to environmental and cultural contexts, vernacular diversity, changing pathological models, or even war time.

The next chapter zeroes in on one specific metaphor: religion. This chapter asserts that religious metaphors enable us to "speculate on 'retrojection,' that is, the way in which metaphors circulating within a society are mapped back onto the body" because retrojection "involves the fusing of a person's awareness of her body and its movements with figurative images, ideological tenets, and material artifacts."[14] Bourke subsequently explores the

Christian notion that pain is a consequence of sin, that pain is a way for personal improvement (because suffering can be read as a "rebirth"), and that salvation, in the Christian sense, uses pain as a language of love. She also acknowledges secular reactions to Christian interpretations of pain.

"Diagnosis" is a chapter many readers, especially those who come to this book from a medical perspective, may have been awaiting, since it examines how pain narratives are used to identify the source of discomfort, especially in clinical settings where verbal reports of pain are used as diagnostic tools. As Bourke notes, problems arise when verbal reports are the preferred method for diagnosis; the inherently subjective nature of these pain narratives might prove difficult for a health care provider who might have to translate metaphors or vernacular colloquialisms, or have difficulties understanding a patient in pain. These problems have led to the development of diagnostic tools that categorize the patient's experience, such as the McGill Pain Questionnaire. Some questionnaires even seek to eradicate language, such as the "Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating Scale." More recent technological advances include neuro-imaging to lend "objective" data to a diagnosis.

The sixth chapter, "Gesture," concedes that words of a pain narrative are "never enough" because "pain is communicated through gestures, inarticulate utterances, facial expressions, posture, and other non-linguistic movements of the body."[15] Bourke argues that "gestures and bodily expressions do not simply *contribute to* those linguistic meanings given to pain, but may independently *constitute* meaning as well."[16] A central concern of this chapter is whether gestures are the "natural language" of the body and thus more trustworthy than verbal reports, or whether they are less trustworthy because they can be "learned" through mimesis and thus easily abused by malingerers. Historically, she observes, gestures were used as a communication and diagnostic tool between sentient creatures, but are increasingly devalued because of the rise of technological devices in diagnosis.

Questions of diagnosis lead to the next chapter, "Sentience," which examines variations in levels of suffering among people in pain. Here Bourke argues that "physical and moral comportment during ordeals of physical suffering" can be used as "a measuring-stick for a range of attributes, including social ranking, level of civilization, and refinement of sensibilities."[17] Bourke's chapter discusses perceptions of racial others suffering pain that usually served as a way to establish superiority over those of a different racial background. Her discussion also covers issues relating to class difference and gender and touches on medical debates about the sentience of infants and fetuses.

In her eighth chapter, Bourke observes that medical practitioners from the eighteenth century onward insisted on "the underlying humanity of their

vocation," but the definitions of their defense changed for each new generation of practitioners.[18] The idea of sympathy being required of surgeons or physicians emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it formed part of a class-based system, in which the elite members of society were on the receiving end of sympathy. Bourke argues that it is problematic to criticize current medical practice based on nostalgic beliefs that only narrative medicine (favoring writing and speech) elicits sympathy, when narrative medicine favored (and still favors) "articulate and often elite patients."[19]

The year 1846/1847 saw the advent of chloroform and ether as anesthetics, and would seem to bring a happy conclusion to the dolorous history of pain. But as the final chapter on "Pain Relief" shows, the ability to alleviate pain did not bring universal relief from suffering. As Bourke observes, shocking as it may seem, many people in the late nineteenth century and beyond "believed that there were significant risks (medical, spiritual, social) to dulling the human senses."[20] Fears about using pain relief usually involved medical risks (such as side effects), social concerns (about physicians abusing power while patients' senses are dulled), moral concerns (about possible addiction resulting from a reliance on drugs), and spiritual anxieties (if pain was viewed as an instrument of religious instruction). Even in modern-day medical care, Bourke argues, pain relief remains problematic because it is intricately linked to class or cultural concerns, ethnic disparities, and stigmatization (for those addicted to pain killers). This chapter cements the contribution that Bourke's book makes to the history of pain. Understanding the history of pain and pain management is valuable not just for historians, but also for medical practitioners and pain sufferers as well.

~Sonja Mayrhofer
University of Iowa

Notes

[1] Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayers to Painkillers* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.
[2] Ibid, 1–3. See also Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[3] Ibid, 4.
[4] Ibid, 4–5.
[5] Ibid, 5.
[6] Ibid, 8.
[7] Ibid, 12–13.
[8] Ibid, 12.
[9] Ibid, 25.
[10] Ibid, 28.
[11] Ibid, 36–39.
[12] Ibid, 54.

[13] Ibid, 54; 60–65.
[14] Ibid, 92.
[15] Ibid, 159.
[16] Ibid, 160.
[17] Ibid, 193.
[18] Ibid, 234–235.
[19] Ibid, 269.
[20] Ibid, 272.

Book Review

Phyllis Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Anti-Semitism*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 2012. 405 pp.

Opening Impressions: Phyllis Goldstein tells the story of two thousand years of hatred and bigotry against the Jewish people. She tells the story with powerful narratives that allow readers to travel on an elaborate journey, complete with the passion of an eloquent tour guide, and then return them safely to the present. This excursion is highlighted by the forced exile of entire communities along with the adoption of laws that strip a people of their citizenship and dignity. The expedition, however, ends in a kind of intellectual purgatory, as she invites readers to linger with unanswered questions and carry with them a bag of countless pieces to a jigsaw puzzle without a picture of it to guide them.

So utterly influential is this work that these remarks will likely fall short in emphasizing the inexpressible urgency found on every page. The author's way of transporting her readers through rich, clear, and insightful writing is nothing less than life-changing.

Chapter Accounts: In "The Beginnings" (586 BCE-135 CE), Goldstein reviews the early signs of anti-Semitism by examining how Jews were viewed on the island of Elephantine, an Egyptian military outpost under Persian rule in 600 BCE, and Alexandria, an Egyptian city under Roman rule in 38 CE. In particular, she explores the courage behind Jewish revolts against the Romans and how those rebellions led to a litany of perceptions by much of the world that Jews are malcontents and unable to be led. The bitterness against Jews continues with an historical analysis entitled, "Separation: Synagogue and Church, Jews and Christians" (29-414 CE). Goldstein focuses on the separation that eventually led to the departure of Christianity from Judaism, and how that separation serves as the roots of religious antagonism that still shapes modern anti-Semitism.

A new dimension of bitterness is recognized in "Conquests and Consequences" (395-750 CE) as she compares and contrasts the status of Jews and other minorities in the Byzantine and Islamic Empires. Then, as outsiders,

Jews suffered the kind of consequences that set the stage for unspeakable atrocities that created the landscape during the "Holy Wars and Anti-Semitism" (700's-1300). Goldstein describes the impact of the Crusades on Jews in Europe and the Middle East, and the complete despair felt among Jews after the death of Jesus. Jews were not only blamed for the crucifixion, but because they were largely forbidden from owning land, property, and from most skilled occupations, they were forced to take up the most wretched occupation among Christians: Money Lending.

"The Power of a Lie" (1144-1300) rattles the very core of how one learns to hate. Illuminating on the causal link between a lie and hate, Goldstein identifies the three main charges leveled at Jews by Christians: Jews were charged with killing Christian children for their blood, performing ritualistic murder, and desecrating the host. Such slanderous remarks lead to toxic rhetoric, the kind taught directly or indirectly in places close to home. Once a collection of lies, formed by stereotypes and molded by myths are rooted in a society, it is relatively easy for a discontented person or some other type of instigator to use them to achieve their own goals. This formula has fueled centuries of hatred. The spawning of new anti-Semitic myths laid the groundwork for "Refugees of Intolerance" (1347-1492). In some ways, Goldstein provides a prelude to Nazi ideology, as she explains how the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 were not unlike the perceptions held by Christians and Muslims in the mid-1300s, that Jews were not followers of a religion, but rather linked together by blood. She chronicles centuries of intolerance that produced the Diaspora, in which Jews fled for safety in many places, only to be faced once again with extermination when blamed for the Black Death (plague) by poisoning the wells, despite themselves dying at an equal accelerated rate.

Spain, with its ousting of all Christians and, in particular, its entire Jewish population, receives unusual emphasis as the author eloquently juxtaposes the Inquisition with key implications about current Spain. In 1492, Spain expelled its entire Jewish population and did not overturn that order of expulsion until 1968. Today, Spain has Europe's smallest Jewish population with less than one-tenth of one percent of the nation's total. What looms larger is that surveys conducted by both national and international organizations show that more than five hundred years after Jews were forced out of Spain, anti-Semitism is still deeply embedded in the culture.

"Search for Toleration" (1500-1635) cites events such as the Black Death and the Western Schism, which eroded people's faith in the Catholic Church and the Papacy that governed it, as seeds to the Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in 1517. Fueled by the forced conversion of

countless Sephardic Jews at the end of the 15th century, Luther's teachings reflect intolerance against the Jewish people and communities are decimated. "Safe Haven" (1200s-1666) compares and contrasts places in Europe that provided Jews with refuge from persecution. The central forces that limited toleration and eventually undermined it emerged primarily from Poland and the Ottoman Empire. The fact that an entire region could turn on a people ignited the "kehillah," a Jewish organization located in many cities, consisting of Jews trained in self-defense. For the first time, active resistance was endorsed by Jewish communities.

In "The Age of Enlightenment and the Reaction" (1600's-1848), Goldstein foreshadows the European justification for anti-Semitism by carefully deconstructing the philosophical mission that laced the age of Enlightenment, including the paradox behind the growth of political rights for Jews in Germany, Austria, England, and France. The deception behind the falsely promoted political rights of Jews emerges in "Anti-Semitism in the Age of Nationalism" (1840-1878). The inception of racial anti-Semitism in Germany is traced by key events: the Damascus blood libel, the Mortara affair, and the Congress of Berlin. "Anti-Semitism in France and Russia" (1880-1905) introduces readers to "contemporary" anti-Semitism, the type that spawned from the impact of the Industrial Revolution and other modernizing forces on the treatment of Jews by examining the causes and effects of the Dreyfus Affair in France, and the pogroms that rocked Russia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

"Lies, Stereotypes, and Anti-Semitism in the Age of War and Revolution" (1914-1920's) explores actions immediately following the end of the First World War that kept European anti-Semitic perceptions alive. These include the Russian expulsion of Jews from the Eastern front, the pogroms in the Ukraine, and the propagation of the contents in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-Semitic hoax purporting to describe a Jewish plot for global domination. It was first published in Russia in 1903, and is considered perhaps the most significant attack upon Jews.

With an unrelenting tone, Goldstein gets her readers "In the Face of Genocide" (1918-1945). In this critical chapter, she hurls an abundance of compelling data that thrusts the Nazi machine behind the wheel of the "Enabling Act" of 1933 that gave Hitler plenary powers and made him a dictator. It followed on the heels of the Reichstag's Fire Decree, which abolished most civil liberties and transferred state power to the Reich. The Weimar Republic was then brought to an end. The major turning point: 1941, when the Nazi's response to the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" was answered at Wannsee. Combined with a thorough treatment of propaganda as a mechanism of control and a surprisingly comprehensive discussion about the compliant nature of the human condition, Goldstein mixes historical

consequences with sociological certainties for her readers to create a formula for true introspection.

"Anti-Semitism and the Cold War" (1945-2000) doesn't leave readers off the hook. Goldstein traces the way anti-Semitism has become a "tool" in both the Cold War and the Israeli conflict. To punctuate this point, she features a vivid examination about the staggering world perception of Jews after the 1967 war. Finally, in "Anti-Semitism Today: A Convenient Hatred," she assigns the newest form of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, as the most dangerous method of banishing Jews and their traditions. She tells us that to deny their loss is to deny their gain. Fearlessly, Goldstein asserts that deniers commit continuous genocide with something far more powerful than the Zyklon B used in the chambers. They use hate.

Closing Impressions: Goldstein's historically-based prognosis about anti-Semitism in the future is pessimistic. As she suggests, many thought anti-Semitism would die after the Holocaust, but it did not. Nor did it disappear when many Christian churches acknowledged that Jews were not responsible for the crucifixion. Still, anti-Semitism, along with other hatreds has persisted despite hard laws on discrimination, hate crimes, and hate speech. What we learn about hatreds is the essential lesson about tolerance: hatreds are not a set of beliefs or ideologies. Rather, they are a collection of contradictory lies that play to our deepest fear. They are promoted by a perplexing need to place responsibility on others, and a desperate need to escape accountability. She raises questions about the consequences of our assumptions and beliefs and the way we make distinctions between "us" and "them." Questions posed throughout her masterwork are crafted to yield poignant responses. We have a chance of becoming better humans after reading it.

As we must understand hate before eclipsing it, so we must understand historical truth. History must be remembered by everyone, including Jews. A rich history that is not confronted truthfully has little chance to be reconciled completely. Still, so many Jews know very little about their past. Perhaps some fear remembering because the horrific events are too painful, or memories are connected too directly to family. However, a desire to forget does not allow for a disconnection from a historical past.

~Henry L. Roubicek
University of Houston-Downtown

Book Review

Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. 367 pp.

Christopher Lasch made a name for himself as a historian with a penchant for social criticism, publishing numerous works diagnosing the ills of American society. Perhaps his most enduring work has been *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, published in 1979 with W.W. Norton & Company. Lasch argued America had become stricken with a pathological breed of narcissism, which had seeped into all corners of society—political and personal. He used a significant amount of psychoanalytical terminology and definitions to make these claims, which reverberated throughout American life in popular magazines and President Jimmy Carter's famed "malaise" speech. With her new book *The Americanization of Narcissism*, Elizabeth Lunbeck attempts to take an in depth look at the psychoanalytical framework Lasch used to construct his *Culture of Narcissism*.

Before her most recent work, Lunbeck had already authored two major works on the history of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, publishing *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Modern America* in 1994 and *Family Romance, Family Secrets: Case Notes from an American Psychoanalysis, 1912* in 2003. *The Americanization of Narcissism* represents a masterful addition to an already illustrious career. Lunbeck begins her book with an "Introduction" outlining how the concept of narcissism was "normalized and pathologized at the moment of its Americanization."[1] Further, she provides an indictment of the social critics, led by Lasch, who caused the concept to "become too ubiquitous" as the critics fought to define narcissism in their own terms. Lunbeck titles her first chapter "The Culture of Narcissism," a nod to Lasch's work and the focus of the bulk of her study. She examines how narcissism came to be culturally relevant in the United States in a variety of contexts—economic and social, political and personal. Towards the end of the chapter she begins to explain the primary feature of her book, laying out how the cultural definition of narcissism contrasts with the psychoanalytical debates of the time.

Lunbeck outlines these differences first with a chapter titled "Heinz Kohut's American Freud," showing Kohut's development of a "positively tinged and appealingly normalized narcissism" and how the social critics' definition of narcissism differed and misappropriated his theories.[2] In the following chapter, "Otto Kernberg's Narcissistic Dystopia," she demonstrates how Kernberg's version of narcissism "brought its malignant dimensions into clear view."[3] Lunbeck is keen to note that *The Culture of Narcissism* cited Kernberg extensively, informing much of what became America's unique brand of the psychoanalytical category. Throughout both of these chapters, she is sure her reader knows the disparities between Lasch's definition of narcissism and that of the theorists he used to inform his work.

In the next section of *The Americanization of Narcissism*, Lunbeck includes a series of chapters centered on different elements of narcissism. The first of these is "Self-Love," tracing the intellectual history of the concept, beginning with Freud's "On Narcissism" and weaving in other psychoanalyst's contributions, including a familiar individual, Heinz Kohut. The second piece of narcissism she explores is "Independence," tracing its roots as a psychoanalytical phenomenon and contrasting it with the positive feeling many Americans associate with the idea. Gender plays a role in Lunbeck's subsequent chapter, "Vanity," which delves into psychoanalysts' definitions of feminine vanity, including Otto Rank's and Freud's explanations for the notion. In "Gratification," she explains how American social critics used Americans' need for gratification to diagnose cultural ills, despite psychoanalysts using a much more nuanced definition in their work. "Inaccessibility" details how psychoanalysts coped with withdrawn and hostile patients diagnosed with narcissism, while "Identity" deals with the contentious atmosphere Erik Erikson faced in the psychiatric world as he tried to assert his definition of the concept. Lunbeck ends the book with a conclusion, "Narcissism Today," which explores the place narcissism holds in modern America, pointing to narcissistic leaders and twenty-first century issues to illustrate her points.

Perhaps the greatest criticism a reader could make about *The Americanization of Narcissism* is the misleading nature of its title, which to some may suggest a cultural history of narcissists in American life. However, the book is a comprehensive intellectual history of psychoanalysts' categorization of narcissism in contrast to Christopher Lasch's use of the term, certainly not a cultural history, but to no detriment to its central thesis. However, an allusion to Lasch in a subtitle might have been made the purpose of the book clearer. Another somewhat valid criticism is of Lunbeck's reliance on Lasch to provide the model for what the Americanized version of narcissism was in the "Me

Decade." In particular chapters, such as "Inaccessibility," she does not place the concept into a broader intellectual and cultural context, only mentioning Lasch before launching into her analysis of psychoanalysts' work. However, in other chapters, she does mention major intellectual figures active during the "Me Decade," utilizing Betty Friedan's "assertion" throughout *The Feminine Mystique* to shed light upon the contentious debate over identity in the United States.[4] Lunbeck's reliance on Lasch varies chapter to chapter, but does not result in any substantial detriment to her work.

When she does rely on Lasch, she does so wielding her expertise in the best way possible. Throughout the book, Lunbeck excels at drawing contrast between Lasch's Americanized narcissism and that of the psychoanalysts discussed in the work. She gives a particularly powerful display of this in her fifth chapter, "Independence," showing how Freud "located the origins of dependency in the earliest stage of human development" while Lasch found "its origins in consumer culture."[5] She takes a sharp critical tone towards Lasch at the end of the chapter, taking aim at how his diagnosis of the problem was based on what he deemed to be a culture of dependence, largely ignoring "what analysts might have considered narcissism."[6] These contrasts are helpful, essential pieces of her book and she uses the technique through to the end.

Lunbeck's care in contrasting disparate definitions of narcissism is not the only methodological strength of her work. Other approaches bring much needed life to psychoanalytical topics. The first of these came in the chapter dedicated to "Inaccessibility." A significant portion of the content in this section is based in a case study centered on Sigmund Freud's and Ernest Jones's "failed analyses of Joan Riviere."[7] Throughout the chapter, Lunbeck uses the extensive correspondence available in the Joan Riviere collection housed by the British Psychoanalytical Society. Through these letters, readers gain access to the debate between major figures in the psychoanalytical world. Lunbeck shows how Jones's and Freud's diagnosis of Riviere was negotiated among colleagues, not just a broad overview of differing definitions. The correspondence brings life to what could have otherwise been a bland, inaccessible intellectual history.

Along with bringing color to complex debates in the field, Lunbeck is also capable of capturing the personalities of each figure in her study. Perhaps this is most evident in her description of Erik Erikson's contributions to debate over identity, showing how his "curiosity and gift for observation" rather than "historical accident" was responsible for his rise to prominence in the field.[8] With this approach, she is able to show how Erikson's work burst onto the American scene, affecting psychoanalysis and social critics alike. Lunbeck also shows how his work connects back to another familiar figure for readers, Heinz Kohut, who's work "shares more with Erikson's than he admitted," despite making an attempt to push him into irrelevance.[9] Lunbeck manages to

construct a narrative that is detailed and accessible, bringing light to debates and conflicting personalities in a way that connects with a wide range of scholars.

As a whole, *The Americanization of Narcissism* is essential reading for any academic whose research or casual interests relate to the "Me Decade," especially if Christopher Lasch's work is involved. Lunbeck has revisited the decade and Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* in a masterfully crafted intellectual history of narcissism. She uses a wide range of psychoanalysts' work to show how Lasch used individual components of their work, often misappropriating the concepts for his own social criticism. Individual elements of pathological narcissism are explored, providing a well-rounded study. Lunbeck has made a significant contribution to the debate about what it means to be a narcissist in America as the nation progresses through the twenty-first century and psychoanalysts and social critics continue to define the concept.

~Jordan M. Reed
Drew University

Notes

[1] Lunbeck, Elizabeth. *The Americanization of Narcissism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014, 4.
[2] Ibid., 37.
[3] Ibid., 59.
[4] Ibid., 246.
[5] Ibid., 126–127.
[6] Ibid., 136.
[7] Ibid., 205.
[8] Ibid., 232.
[9] Ibid., 248.

Notes on Contributors

Brad Baumgartner is a theorist, writer, and lecturer in English at The Pennsylvania State University. He recently completed his Ph.D. in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in *Cyclops Journal*, *Mors Mystica* (Schism, 2015), *The Explicator*, *Human Geography*, *Reconstruction*, and other journals. Ongoing critical and creative projects include *Weird Mysticism*, a scholarly monograph, *Audens Solitudo*, a collection of fragments and aphorisms, and *Celeste*, an experimental novella.

Florent Christol lectures on horror film, the cinema of Tim Burton, and the relationship between aesthetics, culture, and ideology in American cinema at the Paul-Valéry University (Montpellier, France). He received his Ph.D. from the University of Poitiers. His research explores the relationship between popular spectacles (carnivals, circuses, freak shows, blackface minstrelsy, horror films) and social violence (lynching, hazing, bullying, school shootings, etc.). He has contributed to journals such as *Simulacres*, *CinémAction*, *Cinémas*, and has written chapters for several books, including *Cinéma et Histoire* (Michel Houdiard), *George Romero, un cinéma crépusculaire* (Michel Houdiard), *Colloque de Cerisy: autour de Stephen King* (Bragelonne), *Représenter l'horreur* (Rouge Profond), and *Dressed to Kill: Fashionable Horror in Film and Literature* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming). He is currently writing a monograph on Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* and is researching for a book on the post-Columbine horror film.

Edmund P. Cueva is Professor of Classics and Humanities at the University of Houston-Downtown. His areas of teaching, research, and publication include the ancient Graeco-Roman novel, mythology, patristics, and ancient literature and the occult.

Emily Gallagher is a doctoral student of history at The Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. She previously graduated from the University of Notre Dame with bachelor degrees in Education and Arts (Modern History and Mathematics) and completed her honours in history at the ANU later year. Emily's research currently focuses on the experiences of Australian children during and after the First World War. Special

acknowledgements must be given to the Anti-Kriegs Museum in Germany and Ernst Friedrich's grandson Tommy Spree for their support with this research.

Madelon Hoedt is a part-time lecturer at the Faculty for Creative Industries of the University of South Wales, where she teaches courses on Theatre and Drama, as well as Computer Game Design. Her Ph.D., entitled "Acting Out: The Pleasures of Performance Horror," was completed at the same university and focuses on genre, performance and audience affect. In addition to her doctoral research, she has published and presented papers on topics such as scare attractions, Hell Houses, zombie events, performance magic and horror video games. Her current research continues its focus on horror and the Gothic and concerns itself with immersive and pervasive experiences, with a particular interest in issues of narrative, stagecraft and embodiment in live performance and video games.

Sonja Mayrhofer is a Lecturer in the University of Iowa's Rhetoric Department. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa's English Department, where she wrote a dissertation focused on medieval literature and humoral psychology. Her scholarship is often interdisciplinary and is informed by her interest in comparative literature and the health humanities. She was the recipient of a Ballard Seashore Dissertation Year Fellowship and has taught a series of introductory rhetoric and literature classes in the University of Iowa's Rhetoric Department and General Education Literature Program. She has also taught courses for English majors centering on Chaucer, Emotion in the Middle Ages, and Arthurian literature.

Donna Mitchell received her Ph.D. in English Literature from Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland in 2014, and now works there as a Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in English. She is currently writing her first monograph, entitled *The Gothic Doll: Gender Construction and Female Identity in Gothic Narratives (Palgrave Gothic Series)* for Palgrave Macmillan. Her research centres on female identity and gender studies in Gothic texts and it can be tracked on her website: www.ondollsanddemons.com.

Jeffrey Mullins received his A.B. from Reed College and his Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University. He has been awarded faculty fellowships at the University of Oklahoma and Emory University, and is currently Professor of History at St. Cloud State University, where he is Director of Graduate Studies. His prior research and publications have focused on various dimensions of antebellum social reform movements, with a particular interest in the concepts of race and human nature that inform them. His emerging research interests include an inquiry into the nineteenth-century colonization of the Liberia region of West Africa, with a focus on the experiences of the emigrants, both slave and free. A more detailed account of his scholarship and publications can be found at https://stcloudstate.academia.edu/JeffreyMullins

William Nowak received his Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures (with a specialization in Spanish Literature) from Princeton University and he is currently an Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Houston-Downtown. He has published on Spanish and Latin American literary and cultural topics from a variety of historical periods, and one of his current research focusses is the representation of historical memory in post-millennial Spanish horror films, such as *Aparecidos*, *El orfanato*, and the *[REC]* series.

W. Scott Poole is the author of *In the Mountains of Madness: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of H.P. Lovecraft* (Counterpoint, 2016). He is also the author of an unconventional biography and study of the 1950s entitled *Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror* (2014) and *Monsters in America* (2011), winner of the Popular Culture Association's John W. Cawelti award for best book in the field for that year. He is a Professor of history at the College of Charleston where he teaches courses on American horror narratives, the history of the horror film, and the history of Satan and the idea of evil in America.

Jordan M. Reed is the Caspersen School Fellow and a Ph.D. candidate in History & Culture at Drew University. In 2012, he served at the Deputy Research Director for the Pennsylvania Democratic Party before working in marketing and higher education. His scholarly research focuses on the authorship of American history textbooks in the twentieth century, particularly the career of Thomas A. Bailey. He has written for *GradHacker* at InsideHigherEd.com and *Process: A Blog for American History* for the Organization for American Historians. Lastly, he co-organized *Crossroads: The Future of Graduate History Education*, a national conference held at Drew University in 2016.

Henry Roubicek is a Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Houston Downtown. His research is in narrative study and the power of expression. Dr. Roubicek has a number of articles in the area of applied communication and several books to his name, including his most recent, *So, What's Your Story: Discovering the story in you*, published by Kendall/Hunt. He is an award-winning educator, consultant, and nationally-recognized workshop facilitator. Roubicek is a radio personality in the Houston area, a docent at Holocaust Museum Houston, and past president of the Houston Storyteller's Guild.

Nadia Scippacercola is a research fellow at the University of Naples Federico II, where she obtained her Ph.D. in Classical, Christian and Medieval-Humanistic Greek and Latin Philology and where she has been collaborating on research projects for the past several years. Her scholarly interests range from Greek and Latin narrative to the study of the manifestation and persistence of certain invariants in the ancient imagination. She has devoted

special attention to lexical issues in ancient texts and has undertaken a reconstruction of the cultural horizon of Antiquity by comparing ancient perceptions of the world (as expressed in literary texts of that period) to modern historical understandings of the ancient world. In recent years her research has evolved towards investigations into literary sources that describe the Campania region of Italy. She has published several articles and a monograph titled *Il lato oscuro del romanzo greco* [*The Dark Side of the Greek Romance*], and she has delivered numerous papers at international conferences.

Erica Tortolani is currently enrolled at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Communication with a concentration in Film Studies. Her past research explored the intersection of film theory with rhetorical studies, looking specifically at how the cinematic medium can transmit messages regarding gender, sexuality, and the female body through visual and narrative elements. These interests culminated into her Master's thesis, entitled *Dual Images of the 'Monstrous Feminine' in Three Horror Films*, a project that received the 2015 Graduate Research Excellence award at the University of Rhode Island. Erica has also presented at the 2015 Graduate Conference at the URI, the 2016 Northeastern Modern Language Association Conference, and has been published in the Fall 2013 issue of the undergraduate journal, *Film Matters*. Her research interests include film theory and criticism, silent cinema, comedy and theories of humor, horror, German Expressionist film, and feminism.

Katherine A. Wagner is a Humanities Ph.D. candidate at the University of Louisville. Her dissertation examines how placelessness serves as a metaphor for larger cultural fears about globalization within post-WWII American horror literature and film. Regularly looking at the intersections of place and identity, she has contributed to the peer-reviewed journal *Slayage,* two different edited collections about young adult literature, and several editions of the World Film Locations series. Additionally, she is a published fiction writer under the name Katherine A. W. Troyer.

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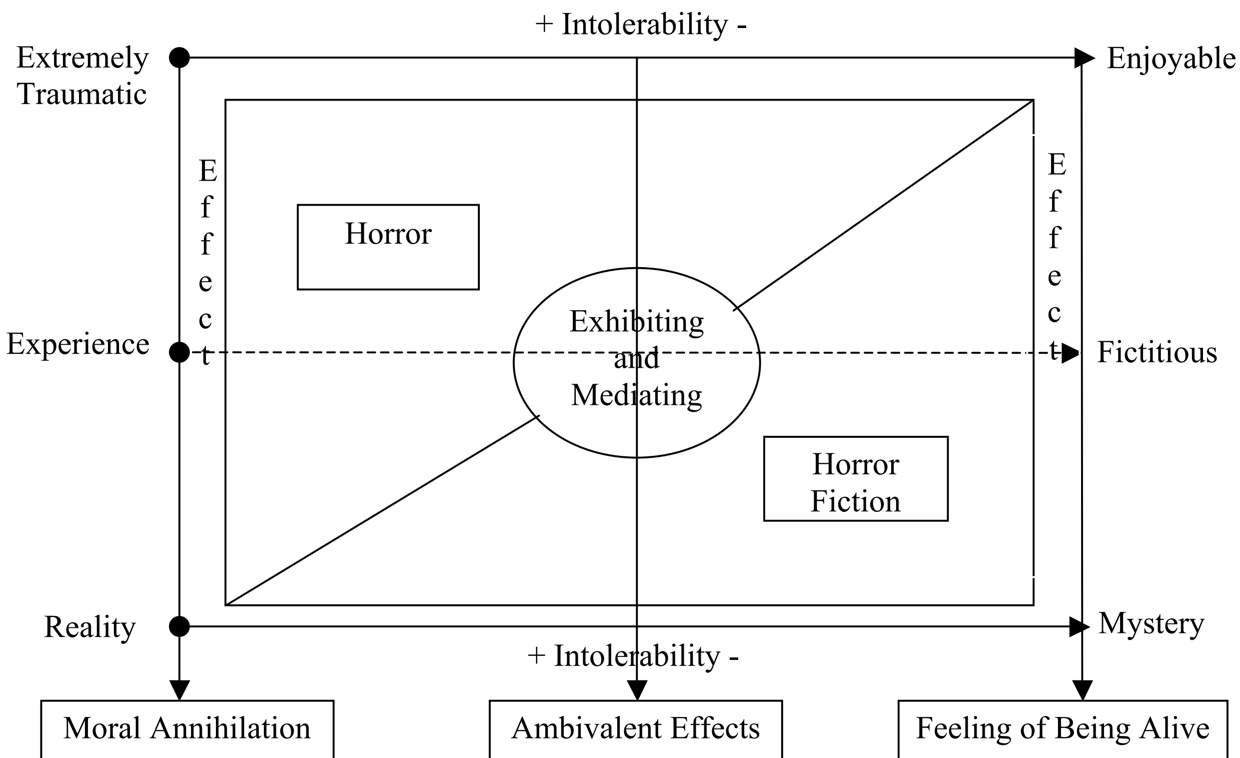
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